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THE SPIRIT OF FRENCH MUSIC

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THE SPIRIT OF FRENCH MUSIC

BY

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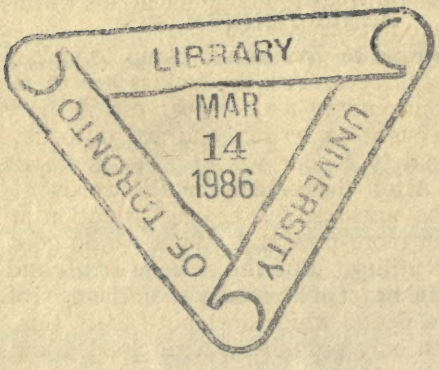
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TO MONSIEUR ANDRÉ MESSAGER

My Dear Master,

An artist favoured by the Muse that inspired of old Grétry, Monsigny and Boïeldieu has every right to the homage of a book in which the praise of French music is sung.

It would have been enough for me to have inscribed your name at the head of these studies, had I had no motive but this for dedicating them to you. But your generous welcome of the first musical work for which I sought a public hearing gives me another motive—gratitude. My prayer is that I may deserve well enough of musical art for it to be said that in giving me access to this second career you have not served it ill.

Is this the time to give ourselves up to such dreams? When the majority of French families are in mourning, while War continues to reap its harvest of the youth of this country, ought we writers and artists to devote ourselves passionately to our work? Yes, more than ever we should. After the cataclysm the needs of human nature will be unchanged; a long privation will have rendered them more pressing. What we do goes beyond the sphere of utility. But the need of truth and beauty lies closer to the heart of humanity than the need of what is useful; and a period which does not satisfy this superior need, or which only provides it with clouded and alloyed satisfactions, is a period in which many things are not well, in which what are called practical interests themselves suffer deep injury. This truth is applicable to all civilised peoples, and eminently so to France. Our works represent the most precious part of the nation's capital, the part whose decline would bring with it the decadence of all other parts. A France whose culture did not turn out the finest products would be a France that the world would hold in slight esteem; or rather the world would not recognise her; not receiving from her those unique gifts

that it expects, it would be little disposed to seek out the more ordinary products that she would offer. Our work, then, is something higher than useful, yet it has utility. It is the radiation of our letters and our arts which will open world-routes to our merchants and our ships.

To work then ! Let us work with an ardour redoubled by grief and hope. The dead who have saved us require of us that we add to our duties and labours those which awaited them. Let us work, striving after that perfection for which the conditions of modern existence are, alas ! none too favourable, but which remains nevertheless the strict law of our professional sincerity.

FOREWORD

I mean this book to be a small treatise of musical taste ; an experimental, not a dogmatic treatise, made out of the observations to which a somewhat close analysis of the work of the masters has led me. The subjects of the six chapters of which it is composed do not form a real historic sequence ; they are : Grétry, Rameau, the Modern Italians, Meyerbeer, Wagner the Poet, Wagner the Musician I have chosen and brought together these subjects, because the reflections and lessons which spring from them seemed to me the most pertinent and illuminating to set in opposition to certain contemporary errors. I hope in a subsequent volume to speak of Lulli, Monsigny, Boïeldieu, Berlioz and the French schools of the second half of the nineteenth century. Thus there will be provided a sufficiently consecutive view of our national music from the time of Louis XIV. to our own day. But my aim, let me repeat, is to act as critic rather than historian, and to guide, as far as in me lies, public taste in a certain direction.

I venture to call the tendencies by which I am inspired *French*, and I do so with absolute conviction. And yet I have not asked myself what is French and what is not. It is a question that should not be asked. One is certain that the reply will be inadequate. It is right to be French in everything : but one must not be so of set purpose. That is the right attitude. The French spirit, French taste—these are things that do not define themselves, do not put themselves into formulæ. It is not that they lack body and reality ; on the contrary their reality as we see it in history is too much alive, too overflowing—and how should we recognise it in history if we did not feel it stirring within us ? There is nothing more real, more distinct, than the physiognomy of an individual, especially if a superior personality shines through his features. But that is a thing that is felt and cannot be defined. It is the same with the French spirit. It is a living individuality.

Should it happen that under the action of disturbing or depressing influences it deviates from its natural line or falls into a state of weakness, it will be no remedy to set before it some sort of theoretical or abstract model of itself to which it must studiously conform. It will be far better to bring back to it the contact and sentiment of the works that it created in happier times when it enjoyed the plenitude and lively vigour of its strength. Nothing could be better calculated to renew its lost or wearied vital energy, to kindle again the flame of its activity.*

*I owe grateful mention to several excellent works which have provided me with historic information or suggestions of ideas. My study of Grétry states clearly enough what I owe to the *Grétry* of Michel Brenet. My study on Rameau does not state clearly enough how much I owe to the work of M. Laloy on this master, and to the admirable study which M. Lionel de la Laurencie has devoted to him in Lavignac's *Musical Encyclopædia*. In the biographical portion of my chapter on Rameau, certain passages in inverted commas, where not acknowledged to another author, are by M. Laloy. If what I have written about Verdi should inspire my readers with a desire to know Camille Bellaigue's eloquent and poetic book, it would be the best reward my sketch could earn.

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CHAPTER I

GRÉTRY

HIS LIFE, WORK, AND IDEAS

If it be true, as people are fond of saying, that Comic Opera is of all musical forms the form most distinctively French, then there has never been a more French composer than Grétry. Grétry is the king, the god of comic opera.

His greatest rival is Monsigny. And Monsigny undoubtedly has sweet and tender touches that are peculiar to himself. But Grétry has more life and strength.

Of all his works *Richard Coeur de Lion* is the only one that is still performed, * so that the acquaintance of Grétry can only be made nowadays by reading. Even for that one must go to a library, unless one happens to be a Croesus possessing the wherewithal to acquire the magnificent edition of his works produced by the illustrious Gevaërt under the auspices of the Belgian government. The piano editions published about fifty years ago by Michaëlis are exhausted, and one hardly ever comes across them. I have been told that shortly before the war the enemy publisher Breitkopf bought the plates. There remains

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*There is a mistake here which makes me realise that I am no longer young. I heard *Richard* when I was young, and was under the impression that it was still performed. It seems that it disappeared from the bills in 1897, a significant date. Everything at that time was carried away in the Wagnerian whirlwind. The anti-French affectation both in music and in other matters was becoming irresistible.

then this great Belgian edition which provides keen pleasure for the music lover. There is the orchestral partition, followed page by page by the piano score, a text of which the accuracy and value are guaranteed by the mere name of Gevaërt ; there are full notices by Fétis and V. Wilder,—all these are to be found in this monument of learning and taste. I have spent many hours with them. I have read Grétry's literary works, those three volumes of *Essays and Memoirs*, so delicate, charming and diversified ; also the excellent work devoted to the master by Michel Brenet, which gives us, besides learned analyses of all his operas, a biography adorned with pleasant documents. My studies and the reading of these works have made me an enthusiastic admirer of the composer of *Richard*. My aim will be to outline, if only sketchily, some features of his genius and his art. They were adored by our fathers, and deserve to be so by ourselves. Time may have taken off the freshness of some of Grétry's productions, but, if we consider their general effect, it has in no degree tarnished their first brilliancy. They will appear younger and more full of savour than ever when restored to the theatre

I

André Ernest Modeste Grétry was born at Liège on the 11th February, 1741. His grandparents, Jean Noé Grétry and Dieudonnée Campinado had married against the wishes of their families, who had punished them by leaving them to themselves ; from this had resulted a certain loss of social standing which the happy couple endured with cheerfulness. They had set up as innkeepers at Blegny, a hamlet near Liège,

and on Sundays Jean Noé used to set the peasants dancing to the sound of his fiddle. No sooner was his son François able to hold a bow, than he began to help his father ; the little fellow was so talented that at twelve years old he gained by competition the place of first violin in the church of St. Martin at Liège. He was soon to become the most eminent violinist in the town. He too made a marriage of affection, but more lucky than his father, he forced the consent of his future wife's parents, though they considered his position too humble or too uncertain. This was the father of the great Grétry. Here then we see at least one family in which the famous law of hereditary progress is faithfully observed. The village fiddler begets the leading violin, and the latter gives the world the composer of operas.

André's early infancy was passed chiefly in the country with his grand-parents. I like to imagine that old Jean Noé was still playing dances, and to find in the memory of these village Sundays the source of inspiration at once so gracious and so lively, so sturdy and so elegant, so rustic and so dainty, with which the musician of *Colinette* and of *Richard* was to depict and animate the gaiety of peasants making holiday.

It was a great grief to the child to leave Blegny when his father put him in the choir of the collegiate church of St. Denis. There his existence was divided between the duties of choir boy, and music lessons, which he received with his comrades from a very rough master. He left St. Denis at the age of twelve, and next received private tuition from a musician named Leclerc, whose gentleness and kindness he praises in his *Memoirs*. The desire to compose was born

in him, and he was considerably excited by the representations of an Italian troupe who were touring the large towns with the *opéra bouffes* of Pergolesi and Galuppi. This troupe spent a year at Liège, and Francois Grétry got the boy admitted to the orchestra. Coming into touch with Pergolesi's work was a revelation to him. On hearing the *Serva padrona*, André (as he writes) nearly " died of pleasure," and the idea that he too one day might compose operas threw him into ecstasies.

He had a very fine treble voice. Having resumed his place in the choir of the collegiate church, with his musical sense exalted and instructed by the Italians, he made an extraordinary impression as a soloist. The musicians of the orchestra in which his father was first violin, began to play *pianissimo* the better to hear him. A canon, a great music lover and a rich man, M. de Harlez was filled with enthusiasm and promised the young virtuoso whatsoever material help he might need to develop his talents. But the boy was eager to establish himself as a composer. He wrote, without any knowledge, a motet and a fugue : in his *Memoirs* he confesses that he had pilfered the ideas from various pieces, but had altered their form and given them new turns to render them unrecognisable His father thereupon decided that he should study ; he placed him at first under the direction of Renekin, organist at the church of St. Pierre, and afterwards under Moreau, organist at St. Paul's. Renekin, delighted at his pupil's happy nature, was inclined to guide him with a loose rein. Moreau, a stern master, would have liked to drive him into hard studies of musical science. He greeted coldly the faulty attempts of the little genius, whereas Renekin had revelled in

them and had played them on his organ. Grétry paid more attention to Renekin than to Moreau. In that he was only following the natural tendency of a period of life which usually prefers facility to discipline when it has the choice. Unfortunately in his case this was not merely a youthful negligence, and in the years that followed he never learnt the necessity of severe studies in his art. At Rome where he spent eight years, we shall find that his school work remained superficial and incomplete ; so much so that when he left that town his master Casali recommended him to a colleague at Geneva in these curious terms : " I am sending you one of my pupils, a perfect ass in music, and knowing nothing , but a pleasant young fellow of good character." " Ass " is more than an exaggeration, and beyond all doubt the man who saw in a Grétry only his weakness in counterpoint reveals himself to us as a pedant. It is none the less true that Grétry had reduced his apprenticeship to too limited a field. Criticism is obliged to take note of this, because of the vast resources of invention and expression of which these gaps in the technical structure deprived a genius marvellously endowed by nature.

Let us not however delude ourselves as to the significance and extent of such gaps in the case of Grétry. We have seen other great musicians possessing more genius than craftsmanship and being more or less seriously hampered thereby in the manifestation and realisation of that same genius. But with them this technical insufficiency was associated (strangely enough) with what one might call an insufficiency of natural musicality, or sense of music. Berlioz for instance. He abounds in eloquent and poetic inve

tions, in great ideas: but he writes badly; his music sounds hard: his "crust" is hollow, hard, tough. That is not the case with Grétry. He is fully and subtly a musician. All that he writes sounds agreeable, his technique is pure: his melody, which is sometimes of the utmost grace and beauty, and which in general recommends itself by a rare justness of accent and expression, is attached to the movements of a bass that is easy, neat and elegant. To what point then does our reproach, or one might far better say regret, apply? To the narrowness, the relative meagreness of his technique, to a certain lack of richness and variety in the harmonies of his lyre. Our pleasure is in no way lessened thereby in places where richer combinations were not needed. But when, not contenting ourselves with the pleasure of so many delicious pieces, and scenes, we step back a little to judge the general effect either of Grétry's work or of one of his works, we cannot console ourselves for his not having possessed craftmanship to that degree that makes the greatest masters and produces works that are armed at all points against the blows of time. It seems to us that he was meant for such work, that he was born to achieve larger flights, constructions of greater breadth and more sustained. There is a perceptible contrast between the strength, the often masterly completeness of his ideas and the exiguity of the dramatic field in which they are produced and flourish so successfully. We have his efforts in the grand style (*Céphale et Procrès*, *Andromaque*, etc) in which superb elements of invention do not attain an effect worthy of themselves, because the style of the mass of the work is not kept up to the same level. We have his conceptions of dramatic music as he has set them out in his

Memoirs, conceptions in which boldness and even largeness of scope are not what are missing, and in which one feels that some internal force is bubbling up, for abstract reasoning would not have sufficed to form them. Under the form of a dream of the future he describes a thousand enrichments that theatre music might receive from the hand of a great symphonist without changing its nature. Someone has remarked, not without justice, that this dream was indeed a prophecy, to be realised in the person of Mozart. But there is my point —I believe that Grétry, if he had gone through a greater and more complete school, would have been a French Mozart,and the true corollary to Rameau.

II

The young artist's most ardent desire was to spend some years in Italy. The generosity of his Mæcænas, the canon, and the existence of a Liège college at Rome facilitated the accomplishment of that desire. The college used to give hospitality to eighteen young students and artists, natives of Liège, who had distinguished themselves in the eyes of their fellow-citizens. It was this college that Grétry entered after a journey on foot of which he has left us a pleasant account. His life at Rome, free from pecuniary anxieties and steeped in the torrent of music which flowed unceasingly in the eight theatres and countless churches of the town, must have been very happy. He was a well-conducted lad (as his master of counterpoint testified in the absence of any other recommendation) and moreover a lad of resource. Finding it necessary to do something to replenish his purse, he introduced himself to a nobleman who played the flute and who had made himself notor-

ious among the musicians of Rome as being hard to satisfy. This music-lover was in the habit of ordering a flute concerto from every artist who visited him : he was never satisfied with it and always sent the music back to the composer with a few pounds. Our cunning Walloon expressed a desire to hear a prelude played on the instrument by one who was such a master of it. And having fixed in his memory all the flautist's favourite passages and runs, he put them in the concerto. The nobleman declared his production admirable and took him into his pay, promising him a small annual salary on condition of receiving a flute concerto in every town where he stopped—for he was a great traveller.

The *Memoirs* of Grétry give us an amusing picture of musical life in Rome at this period, and of the passion of the public for the theatre and for church concerts. What one must not expect to find in the *Memoirs* is an account of the state of musical art, or a judicial mention of the artists who adorned it in its various branches at that time. Grétry is not writing a chapter of the history of music : he is merely telling us about the works and the masters that have specially attracted him by their affinity with his own personality, and by the direct help and stimulus that he felt he could draw from them for the development of his own nature. Of all the different kinds of music it was theatre music that captivated him at Rome : and in theatre-music it was *opéra-bouffe*, and among the masters of *opéra-bouffe*, Pergolesi. Pergolesi was the preponderating influence with Grétry. A study such as this, aiming at the accuracy, but not at the detail, of truth, can afford to neglect the share of the Galuppis, Vincis, Terradellas, in the formation of his art, and the rousing of his genius, and to confine itself to

the share of Pergolesi alone. The public of his time were quite right in calling him the French Pergolesi. It may be mentioned that he had not waited for his visit to Rome before discovering Pergolesi—he knew of him through the Italian company at Liège—moreover the representation of the *Serva padrona* at Paris in 1752 had been a revelation to the French. But it was at Rome that Grétry steeped himself in the lessons to be learnt from him.

Admirable lessons certainly. Yet does it not seem extraordinary that these lessons, apart from those of nature, were the only ones that Grétry had ever received? As source and foundation of a musical culture the *Serva padrona* is a little inadequate. Why did not Grétry go back to the great Italian school that immediately preceded Pergolesi—to the great Scarlatti, the incomparable Stradella—the scope of whose genius is sufficiently attested by the fact that he not only invented the "bouffon" style which Pergolesi has employed divinely in the *Serva padrona*, but also exercised a real domination over Handel's mind? But we must think of our artist as an impatient young man, eager to "arrive" and to make the most of the extraordinary facility of dramatic musical expression which he feels fermenting within him. Now for learning dramatic expression, as far as neatness and restraint are concerned, there is nothing better than Pergolesi. We shall find that Grétry loses no time in producing wonderful fruit from the seed thus sown.

The sense which attaches in French (and English) to the words buffoon, buffoonery, might cause a misconception as to the nature of Italian Opéra-bouffe. We have to deal with no extravagant art-form, but

with a delicate one which wears the garland of gaiety and is also capable of the expression of fine shades. In Pergolesi, Cimarosa, Rossini, and one may add in Mozart, for his masterpieces contain magnificient pages of *opéra-bouffe*—in all these, then, the great attraction of *opéra-bouffe* is that it speaks a language at the same time incisive and playful, one which lends itself to accents of emotion and to bubbling laughter, which can pass without shock or break from the light to the tender, from farce to elegance, from a rhythm of strong comic animation to that of tender sighs. It is this variety, this mixture this enchanting lightness which explains Stendhal's outburst "*Opéra-bouffe* is the masterpiece of the human mind." He added that this cheerful music had the power of moving him to melancholy and to tender tears, whereas music of tragical tone left him resentful and cold; it was not that his sensibility to impressions was blunted; on the contrary it was excessive. His impression can be easily understood if connected with the *Barber of Seville*, the last in date of the masterpieces of *opéra-bouffe*, and the work of the happiest genius who has handled this form. It appears more natural still if taken in connection with the works of Pergolesi and Cimarosa, which have not the richness and dazzling play of fancy of *The Barber*, but which have (as I think) more tenderness and sentiment. I would call attention, for instance, to that air in the *Servant Mistress*, which seems to me to be the masterpiece of that masterpiece—where Pandolphe, brought face to face with the mad folly into which the girl's coquetry is dragging him, considers her with a mixture of fright, passion and philosophy. What flexibility of tone Coloured in turn with pathos and cheerfulness but

animated from beginning to end with a movement and rhythm that are unique, smooth, facile, lively and "tuney," the music reflects every aspect of the subject by which it is inspired, the passion of an old man in love—the pathetic and touching aspect, the laughter-provoking and extravagant aspect. It is absolutely true to life.

III

There you have what charmed Grétry and permeated his spirit. I do not in the least mean to say that this attraction had the effect of making him produce Italian music in Paris. Nothing could be further from the truth. What he received from the Italians he transformed and poured into the mould of the true musical tradition of French comic opera. Now French comic opera had sufficient natural analogy with Italian *opéra-bouffe* to be subject to its influence; it had indeed already come under its influence before Grétry. In other respects it differed from *opéra-bouffe* as the temperaments and characters of the two nations differ and it could easily undergo this influence without losing its essential qualities. As Sainte Beuve remarks in his study on Piron, comic opera started from the humblest origins, namely, vaudeville and the theatre of fairs; but in the first half of the eighteenth century, this unimportant style became raised to the dignity of a real branch of music, a real art form. The names of Dauvergne, Duni (of Naples) Favart, Philidor and Monsigny mark the stages of this progress, which attains with Grétry a special degree of expansion. Grétry introduces into comic opera improvements of declamation and diction

that are due to his study of the Italian masters, an increased abundance of colouring, melody, and musical breadth in which may be detected the soft brilliance of a Roman reflection.

Unfortunately in Grétry's comic operas there is something besides Grétry's music. At the same time that this form was receiving from him on the musical side a new influx of richness, on the literary side it was undergoing the influence and the intrusion of the most detestable sentimental fashion. We are dealing with the years that Rousseau dominates with his eloquent imbecilities—years when what passes for the most beautiful quality and the highest praise is "sensibility." An epidemic of "sensibility" was raging in French society in those days. People gave themselves up to emotional crises and outpourings of heart. They heaved sighs at the mere name of virtue. They believed, and took pleasure in believing that in the matter of morals, sentiments, emotions, joys, and moral maxims, Nature had only just been discovered and realised for the first time. They went into ecstasies on Nature's bounty. A game like this game of imagination sooner or later gets taken seriously and makes people rather silly. The poets who supplied Grétry were second-rate writers, and consequently more at the mercy of fashion than others; and too often they modelled their plots and their language on this mania.

But Grétry rose far superior to all this rubbish. There was nothing rubbishy about the music to which he set it. For his work he drew his inspiration not from the stuff itself but from the sound and true sentiments of which after all such productions are the caricature, and as it were the comedy. It is very true

that " Nature " is good in everything, that she claims her part as counsellor and mistress in men's lives; it is very true that simplicity of character and tastes is a condition of happiness, that we should love virtue, that goodness brings more happiness than wickedness, that mankind knows no joys more sure and enviable than those of affection and friendship—joys unknown to the wicked and the vain. But precisely because these truths are the most natural and most pleasant to realise, and further because it is only given to sincere and delicate hearts to be steeped in them and put them into practice—for these very reasons it is all the more ghastly to make an affectation and indiscreet display of them, to emphasise them and make them a subject of ostentation and vanity. Grétry felt these truths not theatrically or rhetorically or as a matter of " frills," but as a decent man and a poet, and as such with nobleness and simplicity. He expressed in music their effect on him, fully, sweetly, and smoothly. No better illustration could be given than the famous quartet in his opera Lucile, " Where better should one be than in the bosom of one's family? " The words are deplorable, enough to disgust one with family life. But the music is frank, broad, natural, reasonably hearty, full of downrightness and geniality. It depicts as they should be depicted the happiness of good folk who experience, glass in hand, the pleasure of affectionate intercourse with no reserve.

In some of Grétry's successors we find this rubbishy nonsense of false sensibility communicating itself to the music. His music is admirably free from it. But we are left with the spoken part of several of his

works, which ought to be recast (it would not be difficult) in a great many places, to give them life again.

IV

He left Rome after a stay of eight years. He had become known there by a few productions (the most important is a secular cantata, the *Vintage Girls*, which I have not been able to discover). Various circumstances drew him to Geneva,where he produced a comic opera *Isabella and Gertrude*, words by Favart. This had already been set to music by Blaise, but resettings were not objected to in those days. But it was Paris that our ambitious hero was determined to reach. He took advantage of being near Ferney to visit Voltaire, and did not hesitate to ask him for the book of a comic opera. Voltaire promised nothing But he did not lose sight of this young man, who besides having excellent manners showed great self confidence and firmness of mind. When, less than two years later news of the applause which greeted the *Huron* reached Ferney, he sent the musician who had suddenly become a celebrity two proposals for comic operas "one developed, and entitled *The Baron of Otranto*, which he had taken from one of his stories, *A Prince's Education*; the other, entitled *The Two Tuns*, merely in outline." He urged Grétry to preserve the author's anonymity, begging him to offer these pieces to the Italian company as the work of a young provincial. This charge was so punctually fulfilled that the actors, dissatisfied with the books, but discerning in them traces of real literary aptitude, strongly recommended the author to come up from

the provinces to Paris and there cultivate his gifts. Voltaire burst out laughing—and was furious. In one of his letters written shortly after this episode we read " Comic opera is nothing but a glorified fair. I know that this form of spectacle is nowadays the nation's favourite, but I know too how sadly the nation has degenerated. The present century is practically composed of nothing but the refuse of the great age of Louis XIV. This shame is our lot in almost every phase." This tribute to the age of Louis XIV as so generally superior in everything concerning the arts pleases us immensely. But the great man would have been more equitable if he had called our comic opera a " purified fair."

It is a great thing for an artist to have the knack of securing the support of influential men of letters. This knack Grétry certainly had. Apart from the impression of superiority which his personality conveyed, nature had endowed him with a good supply of boldness and enterprise. Diderot, Suard, the Abbé Armond, Grimm (all of whom he knew how to flatter intellectually) and the Comte de Creutz the King of Sweden's minister at Paris, did not wait for his success before shewing their admiration and warmly embracing his cause. His great difficulty was to find a poet and a book of words. Légier, an obscure man of letters, concocted for him a certain " *Samnite Marriages* " a work which was not accepted for the stage, and failed completely at a private performance at the Prince de Conti's. The composer accused the performers of having wilfully murdered his work. This mishap would have been enough to estrange for a long time all the operatic poets from such an unlucky collaborator, but for the devotion of the Comte de Creutz, who was

eager to get things put right for his friend at once, and whose persistence succeeded in getting a poem from Marmontel. This was the *Huron*, taken from the *Ingénu* of Voltaire. It is a mediocre work ; Voltaire's wit and imagination have evaporated under the heavy hand of the adapter. But the music triumphed and brought Grétry fame at a stroke. It was felt that a great musician had been born. The first performance of *Huron* is an important date in the history of French music. A new and fresh musical personality was revealed within the framework of a familiar art-form, the spirit and tradition of which were respected and at the same time given a new lease of life. This mixture, this happy proportioning of tradition and freshness has always been the condition of great successes in the arts.

V

Grétry records how the actor Cailleau of the Italian Comedy, an enthusiastic admirer of the *Huron*, which the composer had played to him on the harpsichord, foreseeing the opposition of his comrades, carried their votes by a pleasant surprise.

He invited them to dinner, and at dessert started humming in his fine bass voice, the air that afterwards became famous " In what canton is Huronia ? "

" Whose is that ? " his guests asked, much struck. The piece was accepted.

This air is already in the master's best manner. We must bracket with it in the *Huron* that very elegant and frank madrigal, " The reeds no more are straight," the charming ariette of Mlle. de St. Yves, "If I ever marry," and lastly a descriptive piece, cur-

ious and full of brightness, the account given by brave little Huron of the battle in which his valour decided the issue.

Lucile, played in the following years (1769) brought Grétry's fame to its highest point. It has to be admitted, unfortunately, that the book (by Marmontel), which must be classified in part as lacrimose sentimentalism, contributed not less to the triumph of the work than did the fine healthy music. Lucile, daughter of the rich nobleman Timante, is about to marry for love a charming man of her own station. But her foster father, the peasant Blaise, is invited to the wedding and comes as a kill-joy. The child whom Timante had entrusted to his wife had died, and in order not to lose her pay as wet nurse, she had substituted her own child. Lucile is Blaise's daughter, and the old fellow, smitten with remorse, comes and unburdens his conscience of this secret which has been weighing on him for eighteen years. You will guess that he does not, as he had feared, cause any domestic cataclysm: the marriage takes place just the same, and everyone is grateful to him for the opportunity he has given them to shew themselves superior to convention, to follow Nature and congratulate themselves upon doing so.

Blaise's air, "Oh, wife, what have you done?" is indeed superb, and I have already mentioned the extraordinary success of the quartet "Where better should one be than in the bosom of his family?" It lingered long in memory. When Grétry in his old age appeared at the theatre, the audience used to sing it in his honour. The soldiers of Napoleon sang it during the retreat from Russia. And after the restoration ,bands used to play it to welcome the royal family in public places. It can be found, I am told, in old collections of songs, those

old maidish havens into which sink, when their original fire has somewhat died down, so many operatic and romantic airs that have in their day served for the expression of quite terrestrial sentiments.

I am not concerned to follow Grétry through the whole series of operas composed by him from his first appearances in Paris (1768) to his death which took place in 1813. The enumeration would be far too long, as it would comprise more than fifty pieces, rather more than one for each year; it would include many masterpieces such as *Richard Coeur de Lion*, *Zemire and Azor*, *The Speaking Picture*, *False Magic*, *The Jealous Lover*, and amongst works of less uniform and sustained merit, *Silvain*, *Le Magnifique*, *The Maid of Salency*, *The Two Misers*, *The Judgment of Midas*, *Céphale and Procris*, *The Cairo Caravan*, *Colinette at Court*, etc., a thousand pieces of admirable and happy growth. A detailed analysis of all these productions, illuminated with subtle and wise criticism, has been given by Michel Brenet, to whose book I would refer the reader. What concerns us more is to characterise in general outline the nature of Grétry's art and genius.

VI

Grétry himself will help us in this investigation, for his was an enquiring mind, and his study of the philosophers inclines him to reason things out, sometimes to absurd conclusions. He has given us a theory of musical expression which would have a lively interest for us even if it merely explained his own method of invention and composition. But it offers at the same time a more extended interest. We find it throws real light on the meaning, foundations, and what one might call the genesis of music in general.

According to Grétry, music is an imitative art. He lays this down with the utmost decision. His thesis will certainly be received as the height of paradox by numerous minds who have trained themselves to think that on the contrary, music is not an imitative art and that its place is beside those arts such as architecture or geometry which create or compose forms without natural models. Painting and statuary reproduce before the eyes visible objects. Poetry reproduces human sentiments, objects which are invisible but clearly defined. What objects does music reproduce? What are the models that sound-forms imitate? Our author proceeds to tell us.

Music is the imitation of the spoken word. It is, indeed, the imitation of sentiment, but of sentiment as manifested and incorporated in the spoken word. It imitates sentiment in the inflexions of language and of speech, in which it finds its natural expression. It imitates the natural movement and rhythm of utterance. It imitates them with a heightening effect, adding accent, force, intensity, and a great increase of pathos and feeling. Therein lies its true aim. But it follows them faithfully, models itself on them. Between sung and spoken speech there is the same kind of relation as between the enlargement of a diagram and the diagram itself, or better still, between a drawing picked out with colour and an uncoloured drawing. Song is a higher power of speech, but it is not substantially something other than speech. It is speech raised to its highest degree of expressive power, of penetrating force. One sees of course that Grétry has in view what song ought to be, what it is with musicians who follow truth and nature, not with bad musicians from whom the facility of

singing without a message is no more withheld than is the power of stringing together meaningless words from bad writers. I do not suppose that he applies these observations to dance music. But the application there is obvious. Dance music imitates the movements and figures of the dance just as sung music does the movements and figures of speech.

From this it results that if music can be called an imitative art, it is not so in the same sense as the other arts that are so denominated. It cannot, as do sculpture, painting and poetry, of itself represent to us the objects that it imitates. These must be present before we can recognise them in musical imitation. We must take note of the words, gestures, or (in dancing) the steps, in order to know exactly what the music that goes with them means. In a word—for music, imitation is not an end. It is a means, a condition, the condition which it must observe in order that its expression may bind itself to the thing's own expression and reinforce it.

We have only spoken of vocal music and dance music. But there is another branch, pure instrumental music without dance or words, the sonata, chamber music in its various forms, the symphony. How are we to apply to these the theory of imitation?

What object can we say that instrumental music imitates? As far as instrumental music is concerned, are not those critics right to whom musical ideas appear as a sort of creation *ex nihilo*, absolute inventions, modelled on no given material?

The difficulty does not escape Grétry's notice. And we see him in the course of his career resolving it in two successive fashions which give rise to reflection but can by no means satisfy us.

The first solution was to shelve the difficulty, the solution of disdain. Grétry put aside the contradiction which instrumental music seemed to offer to his principles by treating it with contempt. He declared that he saw in it only an inferior and ill-determined form of musical invention, as it were a mere natural noise or wailing, a phantom music, almost a false music. To those who enjoy it he says that they are taking pleasure in the metaphysical (in a bad sense), and the vague emotion received from pure instrumental music appears to him to be the mark of dissolute sensibility.

It must be admitted that at the time he talked like that he knew next to nothing of instrumental music. Lacking the special technical education that it requires, he felt not the slightest inclination to try it himself. His attention was given entirely to theatrical work; he had not paid any to the masterpieces which had already appeared in Italy and France, not in the way of symphonies, which had not then appeared, but in pieces for the harpsichord and the organ. Later when the symphonies of Haydn began to find their way all over Europe, he bowed before those admirable works and generously changed his opinion; he exclaims that it is very wrong to profess not to know what message a fine sonata or a fine symphony has for us. But he invents a kind of conciliation between this late-formed opinion and his opinion of early days. He says that instrumental music when it is beautiful is as it were an unconscious vocal music. It is made for words, it is waiting for them, and it will be well to fit it with words. The symphonist (if he feels a real inspiration, a genuine glow) is inspired by an inherent or latent poem, which it becomes one's duty

to dig out and render explicit before the musical work can display all its brilliance, all its meaning.

There we have a theory which may rightly be thought rash. The idea of setting words to the instrumental music of the masters is chimerical, and if tried would I think give worse than odd results. But there is in this proposal, singular as it is in itself, an element of reason, a basis of just observation. Grétry sees very clearly that the inspiration of symphonists worthy of the name of creators does not well up or form itself in a vacuum. It is the birth of a sentiment, an emotion, an image, a vision which occupies the musician's mind, which sets in movement and warms his imagination and acts for him as the interior model which he struggles to reproduce in his musical ideas. This is of course a well known fact in psychology, almost self-evident, and confirmed by what the masters have confided to others of their method of work. The conclusion is clear; instrumental like all other music is imitative. Where it differs from vocal and dance music is that as the object imitated is not in any way explained or presented separately, we do not recognise it. It remains indistinct. The meaning of the music is clearly defined for its composer, but not for us who hear it. As a proof, if we bid five literary men, presumed to be of equal intelligence and sensibility, to depict the sentiments expressed in the symphony in C minor, or any other symphony of Beethoven, we shall get five versions,—not contradictory versions certainly, but quite distinct. Everybody recognises easily whether the state of mind reflected in a piece of music is cheerful or sad, agitated or calm, but that still leaves a wide margin for the indeterminate and vague. Instrumental music is

vague imitation. In this quality of vagueness Grétry at first found a reason for despising this branch of music, but he came to realise that it was not a valid reason. And we, who know not only Haydn but Mozart and Beethoven as well, know that, as treated by them, instrumental music has produced master. pieces equalling in beauty the purest masterpieces of other arts. We have no doubt on that point. But then, how are we to get rid of the strange difficulty which that certainty raises for us, the downright aesthetic scandal or as a German would say, the shocking antinomy established by the existence of this fact—an artistic form at once capable of the highest beauty and essentially vague? Do not reason, taste, and the example of all the other arts teach us that there can be no beauty except in precision?

The scandal is dispersed, the antinomy resolved, if we remark that side by side with its expressive and pathetic element, instrumental music includes another quite different,—an element which performs a part exactly analogous to that of words in relation to vocal music or the dance in relation to dance music. I refer to the peculiarities of its construction which are subject to laws of a rigour only comparable (by analogy) to those governing the models of classic architecture. If in order to be beautiful, instrumental music demands (as it does) great vitality of inspiration, and powerful lyric force, on the other hand nothing can be less capricious than its developments. The latter run between lines whose curve, determined at the outset by the musician's fancy, cannot afterwards be changed. Once the initial ideas, the generative themes (always simple and short with the classical masters) have been laid down, no others can be introduced. From them

everything must be taken, from them everything must proceed,—the courses, contours, and ornaments of the musical edifice. In other words, instrumental music is, as regards its form, the offspring of the Fugue. It is the fugue freed from its formal servitude, its scholastic heaviness, but preserving its essential features under this greatly extended variety and liberty. It is the marriage of the fugue with passion. The fact of its being thus subject to the action of strict and rational rules makes up for all the lack of definite ness that it may have from the point of view of expression. While the force of Lyric impulse, of dynamic life which is communicated to it by the heart and blood of the musician touches the heart of the hearer and stirs his blood, the marvellous regularity of its structure contents his intelligence. This more intellectual element, which seems to be a necessary adjunct to music, is represented in other cases by words or by dance figures. Instrumental music contains it in itself, and supplies it or supplements it by the severe laws of arrangement by which it confines itself.

From this one may conclude that compared with other branches of music there is something artificial in its nature, and that its appeal will always be, more or less, to the initiated. But this observation in no way lessens the value of its masterpieces.

If Grétry had lived a little later, and had seen the great modern expansion of the symphony, he would no doubt have enriched his principles with complements and correctives approximating to those which I have ventured to add, which would have made them true of music in general, as they are of vocal music. In their application to the latter they seem to me to

be admirably subtle, and it is interesting to see how he availed himself of them in practice, and the resources of invention which he found in them.

Music is the imitation of speech. But it could not be so if speech had not already in itself an element of music. In reality music is already latent in speech. "Speech is a sound in which song is locked up." All that is needed is to have a sufficiently fine ear to recognise the song that it contains. Speech, according to the inflexions of the sentiment that it expresses has its intervals, it rests on various points of the chromatic scale, it follows a rhythm. What is required is to give musical precision to all this, to fix and harden these intervals which exist but are not definite, to determine these points, to hold the voice on the most characteristic of them for the required length of time, to bring into prominence this rhythm. Naturally there can only be question of words that express sentiments of a nature to be set to music, sentiment already stamped with a certain lyricism, conveyed on a certain tone. Grétry found this at the Théatre Français, where he attended constantly. He used to note by a series of lines rising, falling or horizontal, the diction of the actors, and by an enlargement of his diagram, with the help of necessary thumb marks, he developed his notes into melody. These were his preliminary studies, his cartoons as it were.

Assuredly this minuteness would have been no use to him if he had not had the spirit of musical invention. But as he did possess that spirit, he found in this method of investigation a wonderful guide. It saved him effort and kept him in close touch with truth and nature. These studies of Grétry on the inflexions of speech are to his melodic inspiration what the light

wire framework is to the climbing plant. Or one might compare them to the body of a piece of fireworks; it needed his genius to set fire to them, but this fire was magnificently controlled, and not a spark was wasted. Moreover the value of this combination of method and active genius finds its proof in the result—Grétry was the most fertile of French melodists.

VII

It is this melodic abundance which, in the absence of performances on the stage, lends great charm to the continuous reading of Grétry's best works. It is the welling up of a fresh spring, constantly renewed, and widely spread. Music has had more powerful creators, capable it may be granted of striking stronger blows. But there has never been one who conveyed so strongly the impression of unfailing inspiration. I have spoken of his music having breadth— for we are not to suppose that because Grétry was a composer of comic opera (the first of our composers of comic opera) his inspiration moves in a confined sphere. I will not base the claim for breadth on his efforts in musical tragedy, to which he brought, in spite of much elegance and feeling, insufficient strength. But comic opera as he handles it, if it is often the Italian opéra-bouffe adapted to French tastes, is often also Middle Comedy, that is to say, the form which lends itself to the greatest variety of sentiments and tones, the form of which Molière is thinking in his famous comparison of Tragedy and Comedy (*Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*)—"When you depict heroes," he makes Dorante say, "you have a free hand: they are fancy portraits in which one looks for no points of resemblance, and you have only

to follow the lines of imagination, letting yourself go and often leaving truth behind in the pursuit of the wonderful. But when you depict men, you must paint from nature; the portraits have to be likenesses and your labour is in vain if your models are unrecognisable."

Grétry has admirably depicted brazen greed in the *Two Misers*, love-lorn and jealous old age in the *Jealous Lover*, paternal tenderness and grief in *Zémire and Azor*, friendship and chivalrous fidelity in *Richard*, domestic happiness in *Lucile*, the impulses, cheerfulness and passing moments of despair of young lovers, here and there throughout his works; and in a score of places too we find him an admirable subject-painter, in his scenes of village festivals, in accounts of battles. journeys, storm and shipwreck. I have mentioned Molière: I do not say that Grétry was a Molière. But he is at least a Regnard, a very prolific Regnard with great ease of production.

Like all great artists, like all choice spirits, he collected and welded together in his personality the most precious elements of the influences to which he had been subject: influences which would in several respects have been mutually destructive in the case of a second-rate mind. His music has something of Paris, and the Ile de France, something of Rome (I do not mean the Rome of Michel Angelo, but of Pergolesi and the eighteenth century), something also of Liège and the Walloon country. From this last source it draws a simplicity, a sort of solidity of construction, which without preventing it from having much life and spirit, does prevent it from having too much. Consider in the *Richard* (I prefer to take my examples from a score which is accessible to all) these

three airs " Tis not the dance I love," " I fear to speak to my love at night," " A bandage o'er the eyes." It is the genius of old French song, with the shade of amorous archness that was in vogue at that period, and a stream of melody that is quite Italian. This fusion of qualities is found again in some of the more masculine airs. Blondel's drinking song, " Sultan Saladin," with the calm strength of its rhythm, the expansive frankness of its refrain, its perfection of line, is certainly one of the happiest and daintiest morsels in the whole of music. It is enough to compare with these pieces those of a loftier tone : " O Richard, O my king." " Though the whole universe should me forget," to have proof of the variety to which I drew attention as the reason for placing Grétry in so high a rank. I refrain from bringing up all the witnesses with which scores unknown to the public and not easily accessible would provide me. My aim is to give a general impression, to stimulate curiosity.

Grétry's facility of melodic invention cost him a great deal of thought and trouble. In any art it is always thus that that fine impression of facility and naturalness is obtained. He tells us that before hitting on the air, so touching and destined to become so celebrated, " A burning fever," he lay on his sofa racking his brains from eleven o'clock at night to four in the morning ; a new domestic he had just then, whom he ordered to light the fire, thought he had lost his reason. Talking on this subject he would say that a composer " could always be sure of making twelve bars of harmony every morning'" but to discover a melody, to put one's hand on the exact spot, the living, hidden spring from which is to issue forth the true accent of nature,—that too may need much labour, but it is

labour of another sort, and one has no certainty that it will have any result. I quote the gist of his remark, a singularly valuable one, and one by which our contemporaries might profit greatly. "Twelve bars of harmony" is as a technical expression no doubt sufficiently vague, but there is no doubt about the meaning. Grétry has in his mind the result attained by work of development and combination. Are we to believe that he treats work of this kind with contempt? If so, he would certainly be wrong, for musical composition cannot do without it, and he himself suffers from the difficulties that are apt to arise through not having the mastery of this kind of work: it is his own weak point. On the other hand it is one of the peculiarities of musical technique that it offers a thousand resources for developments produced as it were in a vacuum, that contain no idea worth the trouble of developing ,and for combinations of sounds and formulæ that can be multiplied and refined indefinitely, without any need, I should say without any real impulse, of inspiration and of life. It is very human that Grétry should look for compensation for his own deficiencies in gleefully drawing attention to this possibility, which some musicians of his time abused. But what would he have said had he lived in our day! What would he have said had he known such and such contemporary musicians, honourably ambitious but never scoring a bull's eye, who overwhelm us, crush us in masterly fashion through an hour of symphony or five acts of opera, not (as the worthy public supposes) by "abuse of learning" but because their expenditure of "learning" lacks any reason for existence, being prompted neither by inventive power, nor intensity of feeling, nor the pressure of any living force within

them. We may even say that it is because of this absence of what is essential that "Learning"—quite the wrong word, by the way—is prodigiously to the fore. Where there are both inspiration and mastery, "learning" exists certainly (and in a higher degree), but one does not notice it.

VIII

I have dealt with Grétry as he was in the prosperous and glorious period of his artist's life. It lasted rather more than twenty years, from 1768 to the first years of the Revolution. The numerous works which he produced during this time met with varying success, but several were brilliant triumphs, and by 1792 the indefatigable composer counted more victories than rebuffs in his total. He was therefore an exceptionally fortunate artist. In this part of his career there fell across his path, it is true, an event which might have wrecked him. I refer to the great quarrel between Glück and Piccini, which divided the world of musicians and music-lovers into two camps both ready to fight to the death. But he had the good fortune to emerge unscathed from this tempest which had seemed as if it would spare no position already won, no established reputation. He owed his safety partly to his own adaptability and tact, but far more to the merit of his works which were recommended not by any brilliant artificiality, but by the calm and steady light of truth. The realm of comic opera in which he held sway was not drawn into the battle, or at any rate did not incur heavy casualties.

The Revolution was destined to affect his interests far more seriously. Not that he put himself forward as

an opponent or even as a passive resister ; nor did he leave anything undone to gain the favour of its successive governments. On the contrary, considering the sympathy he inspires in other respects, one is rather disconcerted at the tenacious eagerness he shewed in trying to curry favour—indeed in one case he went rather far. But after all, this fine poet, a perfectly sincere man in private life, a good husband, a tender father, a man of talent, was also a peasant, as much set upon making money as he was keen to work ; his task once done, and done well, he was not the man to hamper himself with too refined a delicacy when it was a question of drawing his fair profit.—Here is an illustration that comes to me by oral tradition : on days when one of his operas was being produced, the composer, wearing a cloak that half concealed his face, would stop in front of the theatre posters, making the gestures of a man who is absolutely delighted at what he reads. When bystanders had begun to collect, he would exclaim, " Aha ! They're playing Grétry's *Epreuve villageoise* to night, I must be off to book my seat,"—and then he would go and repeat the scene at another posting station, as they were called in those days. It was innocent enough. It was in just the same innocent spirit that our hero did all that was necessary, and more, to make up for the compromising effect in the eyes of the revolutionaries of the favours with which the " Tyranny " had rewarded his talents. He who, being extremely appreciative of elegance and grace in society, had more than most men worshipped the Court, who had received delightful treatment at its hands, who had given dainty and expert models of flattery in his dedications to the Comte d'Artois, the Duchess of Polignac, and the Duke of Choiseul,

perhaps did really persuade himself that it was to the sentiments of republicanism that he had imbibed from his infancy that he owed his love of liberty and horror of enslavement, and that " he had never been able to endure the proud smugness, based on false prejudices, of the nobles."

The fall of royalty had caused him to lose his posts, notably that of director of the Queen's band, and the allowances on which he lived ; he would have needed to be more of a Spartan than can be expected of one who wields the lyre, not to have wished to obtain some equivalent from the new régime. But what was more serious was that from August, 1792 the performance of Grétry's previous works became practically impossible. Bands of revolutionaries made themselves masters of all places where public performances were given and greeted with shouting and tumult every scene and every line that recalled,—even in the most insignificant and harmless manner, without any special intention of justifying them,—the picture of political and social institutions that had been over turned. Thus " O Richard, O my king " could no longer be sung in public because of the word King, and it can be readily understood that hardly any of Grétry's works could find grace with a censorship of which his librettists had been quite unable to foresee the peculiar susceptibilities. The revolutionary theatrical censorship adopted literally the point of view (if you can call it a view) of a certain citizen in our own day, who hearing a political speaker allude to the nobility of the scene where he was speaking (a part of France full of illustrious and ancient memories) noisily interrupted him with the words, " There's no nobility now." The Committee of Public Safety

issued, among other similar edicts, an order prescribing the substitution of the expression "serious father" for "noble father" in the theatrical vocabulary. Soon the turbulent elements in the crowd would only tolerate on the stage political pieces in which their passions were flattered. *Colinette at Court*, *False Magic*, or *Silvain* were no longer in season. To perform them before the agitators and ranters of the clubs would have been just like giving wild beasts roses to eat.

So, like other musicians, Grétry had to compose revolutionary music. I will not include under this heading a *William Tell* which appeared in 1791, an unequal work containing spirited passages stamped with the sincere enthusiasm inspired in the composer, as in so many others by a political movement about which it was still possible to have illusions. But I would pick out from the list of his productions between 1792 and 1794, *Joseph Barra*, "a true history in one act," a Hymn for the plantation of the tree of Liberty, some pieces for the opera, *The Congress of Kings*, done in collaboration with several other composers, and lastly *The Feast of Reason or The Republican Maid*. This last work is the only one which casts a shadow over Grétry's memory. It breathes a fanaticism which I believe to be insincere. We have in it a priest who tears his cassock and breviary and appears garbed as a *sans culotte*, women who go to sleep at the recitation of a Pater and an Ave Maria, and wake to the strains of the Hymn of Reason. This performance was given when the Terror was at its height,—I prefer to let my mind dwell on the castigation which the *Memoirs* of Grétry inflict on that régime.

IX

In any case he was not a success as a revolutionary musician. And when one considers what the music of the Revolution was like, he is to be congratulated on the fact. With the exceptions of the sublime *Marseillaise* and the two masterpieces of Méhul, the *Song of Departure* and *Song of Return* (the latter not so fine, but still very strong and stately), the history of French musical art offers nothing worse. Cherubini was a great musician, Gossec an elegant and lively composer with a happy cleverness, Lesueur an artist by nature, very interesting and bold. But their civic music, characterised by a clumsy and hollow emphasis which they mistake for Roman majesty, is unbearable. It is rather like Glück re-fashioned after his own taste by the theatre fireman. Grétry could not adopt that tone. He had lived too long under the reign of good taste.

Moreover these composers brought in a richer instrumentation, and, one must admit, a fuller scoring than his, which had always been rather scanty. These new methods also helped to estrange the public from him. However in 1797 a reaction took place in his favour. *Lisbeth* and *Anacreon* and *Polycrates* (a very interesting work, though one misses in it the bloom of his best years) were very successful.

During the last ten years of his life he almost gave up composing. He said that music now only interested on its theoretical and philosophic side, and he felt himself beset by all the questionings of the human mind. He gave himself up to meditation and began to write. He wrote with a certain child-like simplicity if one may judge by the title of a work that appeared in 1801 :

Concerning Truth: What we were, what we are, and what we ought to be. These pages have been bound up with his *Memoirs and Essays on Music* published in 1789. The whole makes three large volumes which can be read with great enjoyment. The *Memoirs* are charming The *Essays* in spite of an element of confusion in the most general ideas, are full of wonderful passages, especially on vocal music, the rightness of melody, prosody and declamation, matters which the master treats with a subtlety that has not been equalled since. As to Grétry the metaphysician, moralist and organiser of cities, he is a mild disciple of Jean Jacques, spreading himself in amiable ineptitudes.

We must pick out from his *Memoirs* a well-told anecdote which throws a very clear light on Rousseau's character. The latter had got introduced to Grétry at the first performance of *False Magic*, and with a great deal of gush had sworn eternal friendship. As they lived not far apart they came from the theatre together. The paviors had left in the middle of the street a heap of stones which Jean Jacques found some difficulty in crossing, and Grétry who was nearly thirty years his junior wanted to help him. The philosopher's serenity was clouded, he rejected the proffered aid, and left him without a word, never to see him again

The private life of Grétry was both happy and unhappy. Married to a loving, simple and faithful wife, he had by her three charming daughters : one of them, Lucile, was a little musical genius, but consumption carried off all three before their twentieth year. In the closing years of his life he installed himself at Montmorency, in Rousseau's celebrated Hermitage, and there numerous visitors, among them Queen Hortense and young Boïeldieu, came to pay homage to his

fame. The writer Bouilly who had been engaged to his daughter Antoine, has drawn this pleasing though slightly turgid portrait of the old man: "All the most striking marks of wit and delicacy were stamped upon his venerable face. Through the dignity of a great artist accustomed to the homage of the most distinguished, there pierced a geniality that charmed and broke down barriers. An old-fashioned Liége accent, which he had retained from infancy, gave his words a sort of attraction that doubled their expressiveness. I felt that I was looking on Anacreon, or on an Orpheus who had taken a new form to enchant mortals with the ravishing sounds of his lyre."

Fétis, in his *Universal Biography of Musicians*, gives a different impression of his illustrious compatriot. He tells us that Grétry's society was by no means agreeable because he always brought the conversation round to his own work. It is indeed true that nothing is more trying than this trick, which is so usual with artists: one readily excuses it at a distance, but it is unbearable at close quarters. It is probable that both Fétis and Bouilly have done him justice, and that with age Grétry improved and was less absorbed in himself. That also is quite usual.

XI

If I could feel that this rapid sketch of Grétry's life, work, and ideas has entertained my readers, it would be a great satisfaction to me. But I aim at another result. I would like in the measure of my humble ability, to restore him to favour, and help to drag his best works out of the dust of libraries. It is true that for their performance there would be two great difficulties to overcome, but neither of them is insuperable.

The first difficulty is a literary matter. Among the "books" which Grétry set to music, a large number are full of artless ineptitudes which would have to be removed. We have in Paris more than one man of letters endowed with sufficient tact and lightness of touch to carry out this enterprise with success. The words of the sung text ought to be religiously respected, but as they have a very general sense and are applicable to very various situations, it would be possible without inconsistency to touch up in many places the detail of the spoken dialogue and even the plots.

A second difficulty, this time a musical one, lies in the disproportion between the small orchestra of less than twenty five players for which Grétry wrote and the dimensions of our modern theatres. You may say it is very easy to double the number of musicians. It is not easy, for that cannot be done without re-shaping the orchestration, a delicate task which requires the hand of a very clever master. Some eighty years ago Adolphe Adam, the celebrated composer of "If I were King" undertook it in the case of *Richard Coeur de Lion* and utterly spoilt that admirable score by introducing trombones, and accompanying with a tremolo the refrain of "A burning fever," and twenty other pretty tricks of that sort. The same Adam similarly ill-treated Monsigny's *Deserter*. To-day a just appreciation of style is found far more generally among our musicians than in Adam's time, and the required expert could assuredly be found.

But there is another solution which would get over the difficulty by giving the works of Grétry in a small hall. This was tried about ten years ago by the Théatre de Monsieur (Rue des Mathurins) of ephemeral

memory. In those days I knew next to nothing of the great master, and I shall always remember the absolutely astonished surprise with which I heard there the *Speaking Picture*. Among many other beautiful things it contains a certain tale of storm and shipwreck that is bursting with genius, animation and life. The Théatre de Monsieur itself soon made shipwreck, being something far too French and distinctive to hold its own in a Paris from which French taste had almost disappeared, in music at any rate, and in which the public would look at nothing that was not massive, heavy, noisy, clouded and clumsy—Boche in fact. We may hope to see the last of this thick-headed and barbarous form of snobbery, and perhaps there will be a chance of life for a small theatre in which would be played, in the setting and under the material conditions most suited to them, the operatic masterpieces of the eighteenth century. What I have said on this subject is not inspired merely by historical interest, but by the hope of bringing back to life, by contact with these masterpieces, a form of French music,—and so natural a form,—that has died out.

In the meantime there is one place, and a privileged place, where Grétry ought to be restored at once to high honour, though his creations seem to have fallen into utter neglect there. I mean the school, the Conservatoire. There there is no need of settings or orchestra. A piano is enough. It is outrageous that at the Conservatoire there should be classes and competitions in Comic Opera, and yet they never sing a line of Grétry who was the genius of Comic Opera incarnate.

CHAPTER II

RAMEAU

His Theories—His Work—His Enemies

The worthy Deltour, in his day a university inspector, wrote an excellent book against the enemies of Racine. Another such book might be written against the enemies of Rameau, our musical Racine. He too found himself attacked at the height of his glory by a powerful cabal. But unlike that which was formed against Racine, this cabal was not fomented by jealous rivals. At its head were, not players of the lyre but philosophers of importance, dealers in general ideas, great lights of literature, and their names were Rousseau, Diderot, and Grimm. This Genevan, this German, and this Frenchman—as impressionable as a blank sheet of paper—, picked a quarrel with one whom Voltaire calls the greatest musician in France (he still deserves that name of posterity)—and this quarrel is one of the dominant, in fact one of the critical events in the history of our national music. I do not wish to rake up the details, but I should like to investigate its causes and give a general view of the interests and ideas which led the artist's detractors into this contest. For this purpose we must briefly call to mind the characteristic features of Rameau's career and work.

I

Rameau was as everyone knows not merely a composer of genius. He was also a great theorist in the technical side of his art. The work that he has left under this head alone would suffice to keep alive his name. Before writing the most richly and nobly harmoinsed music that our soil has produced, he devoted a long period of his life to the study of the abstract and theoretical science of harmony, to the investigation of harmonic properties, and to making a synthesis of those properties by connecting them with the general causes and initial facts from which they are derived. From the beginning of his artist's life he had felt on this subject a reformer's vocation. The doctrine that he had been taught struck him as confused and inadequate. It had not seemed to him to be at all in agreement with the practice of the succession of great masters for more than a century past, and in particular of Lulli. It took no account of their most striking features when compared with the masters of the preceding age, namely the preponderating and quite natural importance that harmony had assumed in their style of writing. Of all the various elements which go to make up musical utterance, harmony had become, with them, both the fundamental and the dominating element, the element on which all others rest and which regulates their use, at any rate in a great degree. Rameau saw in this transformation of the art not a simple fact, but a decisive step forward, the arrival at actual truth. He considered that by giving this place to harmony, by taking it as foundation and guide, he was doing what was needed for music to give it a wonderful increase

of scope and extend its field of expression; music would thus enter on the wide and royal road that would lead to the most vast developments. The study of masterpieces and analysis of his own inspirations confirmed him in this idea. The invention of music is above all else an invention of harmony. To imagine a musical utterance is to imagine a sequence, a linked chain of chords embracing a certain expressive sense. The other portions of musical invention, that is to say melody and the interplay of concerted parts, are virtually included in these; they merely define, detail, shade, or as a philosopher would say actualise, the latent expression. Obviously this does not mean that for Rameau melody is deduced mathematically, and by a simple operation of logic, from harmony when once discovered. No, the creation of melody demands a special initiative, a stroke of genius of its own, a fresh inflow of the grace of inspiration. But that is a second process, and harmony does at least lay down for melody the limits within which it must trace its own line. Similarly it fixes for the intermediate processes certain signposts, certain points they must pass. In cases where the melody has been hit upon first, where a musician rejoices to have found a good piece of melody, this melody postulates, or contains in itself, a certain harmony which is neces sarily bound up with it, and which has implicitly guided the artist's mind, because in the natural order of things harmony precedes melody.

Ignorance of the true doctrine concerning the function of harmony in music was not the only fault that Rameau found with the instruction he had received He complained also of not having found in it satisfying doctrine on harmony itself. Harmonic proper

ties were not rationally classified, exactly defined, or traced to their true origins. They were presented diffusely and without connection, or else grouped in a purely empirical fashion. To Rameau this belated condition of theory was intolerable. He could not rest till he had resettled it, or, to speak more correctly, constituted it properly. For him the re-casting of principles was the only path to creation. Some might (I do not myself) contest the accuracy of his ideas on the primordial function of harmony in musical composition. But the world has accepted his explanation of the laws and rules of harmony. It has become classical, and by classical I mean scholastic.

We may compare him on the one hand to Malherbe and on the other to Descartes. His reform partakes of the spirit of both these great men. Rameau resembles Malherbe in being an artist who aspires to define the general conditions of purity and greatness in style. He resembles Descartes because these conditions depend essentially on the conduct of harmony, and harmony rests on physical and mathematical causes which have to be fixed and co-ordinated. The son of the Dijon organist was dowered from his cradle with the genius of art and the genius of science. Of these two gifts, the first was undoubtedly the stronger, but so far from stifling or ousting the other, it actually stimulated it, by providing, nay imposing the subject of its application. The material of Rameau's studies is the physics and mathematics of sonorous beauty. I have compared him to Descartes and Malherbe. It is exactly the same comparison as was made by the greatest critic of the century, Voltaire, when he called him " our Euclid-Orpheus."

I try to write in a manner that can be understood

by all, whether learned or ignorant. Have I perhaps, in spite of my good intentions employed a somewhat too specialised vocabulary ? Here in another way of presenting the same matter :

One may say that since its earliest days music has gone through three great phases, has existed under three forms : monodic, polyphonic, harmonic.

Monody is song without accompaniment, (or accompanied rudimentarily by a single note). The music of antiquity, and Plainsong, which is its continuation, are monodic.

This form was succeeded at the Renaissance by *Polyphony*. The latter contains in itself harmony, since several voices while singing together different parts have always to find a just harmonic relation among themselves. But the harmonic order of the piece, that is to say the successful choice of chords and sequences of chords, is not, in the eyes of the polyphonic composer, the principal and essential object of musical invention ; it is only the secondary and as it were accidental object. What he takes into consideration before everthing else is the relations between the melodic lines followed by each of the concerted parts. These lines are taken as so many diagrams between which they must always maintain certain formal relations perceptible no less to the eye looking at the score than to the ear that hears it executed. A melodic phrase given out by one part will pass successively into all the others ; either by direct imitation or with certain regular transformations under which it remains recognisable and continues to be itself. Imitations, reversals, condensations, elongations of the given theme, these are the springs in play in Polyphony. Harmony is merely a condition to which this play is submitted ;

it is treated here as though it had only a negative interest.

Rameau's doctrine explains and justifies the accession of *Harmony* to the kingship of music. Incidentally this doctrine, as happens with all great reformers, is unfair to the past. Rameau despises plainsong and the polyphony of the sixteenth century, just as in his day people despised the Gothic, and we are far from sharing this exclusive spirit. We can enjoy the expressive beauty of the church Monody and the marvels of polyphonic force in such writers as Jeannequin, Lassus, Josquin des Prés, Palestrina, Vittoria. But in itself Rameau's thesis is the truth. The complete discovery of the world of harmony, harmony known at last in all its richness and made the foundation of composition, this was an immense step forward in musical art. Out of this progress arose the great and superb forms whose nature and proportions infinitely surpass the power and resources inherent in the preceding forms of music: I refer to Symphony and Opera. Modern form in no way excludes the ancient forms. On the contrary it embraces them, giving them their full share in expression.

Have I still been too technical, too abstruse in what I have said? Literature will provide an analogy that leaves nothing to be desired in clearness.

When one states that the written style of our great classics, Malherbe, Racine, Bossuet, Voltaire, is superior to the style, or rather styles, largely individual because not firmly set, of Montaigne, Rabelais, Amyot, is one not uttering a sure and ascertained truth? No one can seriously doubt it. Certainly one may regret, with Fénélon, the loss in classical French of certain qualities of simplicity that gave a great deal of charm to each literary genius of the sixteenth century. But by the

fixation of its vocabulary, the clarity and precision of its general terms, the firmness of its syntax, the admirable regularity of its constructions, the perfection of its rhythms, classical French far surpasses the French of the preceding periods as an organ of reason, an instrument of poetry and eloquence. Well, there is likewise in music a classical style, a language of Bossuet. And if Rameau is not the first to have understood the constitutive conditions, the natural laws, the essential mechanism of this language, in which have been written the greatest and most permanent masterpieces, at least it was he who mastered them most completely and most in the manner of a philosopher, who best coordinated and deduced them, and who showed most intellectual mastery in attempting (with some success) their synthesis.

II

The technical doctrine of Rameau is set forth in the *Treatise on Harmony reduced to its Natural Principle* which appeared in 1722 and in *Harmonic Generation*, issued in 1737. These are Rameau's two principal theoretical works. They find their complement in a long series of dissertations and monographs published from year to year in reply to criticisms, to clear up or to develop points on which discussion had arisen. The whole is written in a firm and strong style, but the argument is often close even to obscurity, and overloaded to the extent of being too complicated, and the study of Rameau's ideas would be a truly severe exercise, were one obliged to undertake it from his own text. Happily we are spared this by the work of d'Alembert who in his *Elements of Theoretical*

Music as practised after the principles of M. Rameau (1752) gives us a most simple and lucid summary of the doctrines of the *Treatise*. The trouble taken by this great and illustrious geometrician on behalf of the conceptions of a musician, shows the rank that he assigned to him among men of intellect.

When the *Treatise* appeared, Rameau, born in 1683, was entering upon his fortieth year. He had so far published nothing but a collection of pieces for the harpsichord. During the ten following years he produced two other collections of the same kind and four "French Cantatas," short compositions, full of charm but lacking in relief, for one or two voices with accompaniment by three or four instruments.

The collection for the harpsichord contains masterpieces that became celebrated; M. Louis Diemer's marvellous execution and clever transcriptions have re-won popularity for them in our own day. And yet these works contributed far less to Rameau's fame among his contemporaries than the Treatise, which enjoyed considerable success.

We must not be surprised at the favour accorded by the public to a work so dry and technical. It was in keeping with the spirit of the age. Fontenelle's *Talks on the Plurality of Worlds* had brought into fashion the material of experimental knowledge, or rather they had provided wonderful sustenance for the craving for natural philosophy which the evolution of ideas had engendered in polite society. This taste had spread and become generalised. It found striking and amusing expression in the fact of Voltaire and Madame de Chatelet setting up in the country a physical laboratory, though they had hardly mastered the elements of Physics, and translating the *Principles*

of Newton. The discoveries and systems of Rameau on harmonic properties and their "generation," on the physical and mathematical reasons of musical enjoyment, profited by this curiosity. But the glory which the author derived from them could not but be of a somewhat austere kind, like that of the great logicians who bring mankind more enlightenment than pleasure.

Who could have believed that he was not destined to content himself with this glory, and that he was preparing to achieve in addition the more enviable fame won by the creators of pleasure, the favourites of Apollo? Who could have believed that those thirty years of a life so laboriously spent had been merely the preface of his life, and that he was to enter, when over fifty years of age, on the most brilliant and splendid phase of his career, and reveal himself as one of the greatest poetical discoverers of modern times? It was indeed when he was more than fifty, at the end of the year 1733, that Rameau decided on a theatrical venture and brought out his first opera, *Hippolyte and Aricie*, the first ring in that marvellous chain which includes the *Indes galantes*, *Castor and Pollux*, *Dardanus* the *Fêtes de Polymnie*, *Pygmalion*, *Plotée*, to name only the finest links. Was it not madness to venture at that age into a field where only youth and force of imagination can prevail? A symbolist might say that it was not the first folly of the kind in the artist's life. At forty-two he had married a girl of eighteen. He had had no reason to regret it and she had borne him a charming daughter. At fifty, we find him giving himself to the embraces of the Muse, and receiving from her inspirations equal to those of the greatest composers, and some of them, to my thinking, superior to anything to be found in music.

III

One cannot interest oneself in Rameau without wondering why the manifestation of his great creative power came so late. More than one biographer has thought to answer the question by pointing to the relations formed a little before the year 1732 between the musician and the *fermier général* Le Riche de la Popelinière whose wife was his pupil. It is suggested that the protection of this wealthy Maecaenas encouraged Rameau to work for the theatre because it gave him the certainty of a welcome. Such an explanation is too material. Rameau undertook his dramatic work when he felt his powers were strong enough to realise his visions. It is indeed true that the support of La Popelinière helped greatly to open to him the doors of the Royal Academy and to spread among the public the expectation of great things from him. But it is morally certain that what made him take to work on a scale and in a style quite new to him was the magnificent development attained by his resources and means of expression. La Popelinière was the ladder that he used to gather ripe fruit. But what ripened that fruit was the rising of the sap. What is interesting is the fact of this splendid maturity coming upon him in the after season.

How we should like to be in the confidence of the artist himself about the long, hidden portion of his life which preceded this period of brilliance! But, so far from being allowed to know the history of his mind, we have only the most imperfect knowledge of his outward life during the twenty years that passed between the moment when he left the paternal roof and his definitely establishing himself in Paris.

The son of Jean Rameau, organist at the church of St. Etienne at Dijon, he began his classical studies at the Jesuit College in that town. If we may believe his Dijon biographer, Maret, whose short account of him was written just after his death, " he distinguished himself at this college by an unusual vivacity ; but during the classes he used to sing or write music, and did not get beyond the fourth class." He retained from these somewhat inadequate studies, enough Latin to be able to read treatises on composition written in that language. But he had remained somewhat inexpert in the handling of the French language, and the same Maret tells us that one day "a woman of whom he was fond reproached him with this ; he at once set to work to study the principles of French, and so far succeeded that in a short time he was able to speak and write correctly."

At the age of eighteen he set out for Italy in order to perfect himself in his art. But he went no further than Milan, made only a short stay there, and returned to France. There is some ground for supposing, though it is not certain, that for some time he travelled and " lived as best he could, making his expenses by playing the organ in churches, or the fiddle in the orchestra of a strolling company." At the beginning of 1702 we find him installing himself at Avignon as organist of Notre Dame, and some months later he obtained similar employment in the cathedral of Clermont in Auvergne. It was there that he composed his first harpsichord pieces, and perhaps the cantatas which he published later, though their renown in any case did not at this time extend beyond the limits of the province. He passed four years at Clermont. The desire for a change having come upon him before

the expiration of the contract which bound him to the chapter of the cathedral, he could not persuade the canons to give him his freedom with a good grace, whereupon (such is the tradition) he took the heroic course of making himself intolerable by playing the organ in an appalling fashion. However, the same tale is told about his brother Claude who was an organist at Dijon,so the matter is open to doubt.

From Clermont he proceeded to Paris, where he was to gain his livelihood from two posts as organist, one with the Fathers of Mercy, the other with the Jesuits of the Rue St. Jacques. Here begins the part of his career of which very little is known. It has been impossible to ascertain the exact duration of this stay in Paris, during which he did not acquire fame. It is only known that he afterwards spent some months at Dijon with his family in 1715, and that he lived some time at Lyon, though it is not known what post he occupied in that town. We find trace of him again at Clermont, whither he returned ; the canons cannot have had too unkind a memory of his escapade (assuming that it is not a myth), seeing that they gave him back his post as organist. Clermont boasts therefore two great musicians, in two different branches of music, its organist Rameau and its bishop Massillon. It was there that the Treatise on Harmony was completed, the fruit of twenty years of reflection and work, "a very large volume—too large, reeking of the provinces and solitude," as M. Laloz expressively writes—but it was a volume full of genius and discoveries, and it only remained to launch it in the world. Rameau now felt that fame was close at hand, and set off, with no intention of turning back, for Paris. In 1723 we find him definitely established there.

The friends that fame brought him used to question him sometimes on his experiences, ambitions, sufferings and dreams during those twenty years of " provincial solitude,"but they got no reply. One of them tells us that he was dumb about his past. He unbosomed himself on that subject to no one, not even to his wife. Famous men, especially those who have become so late in life, have a very natural inclination to tell the story of their years of obscurity, as though they wanted to give them a share in the sun of their renown and in the presumed immortality of their works. This inclination did not show itself in Rameau. No doubt he judged that all these people who clamoured for his reminiscences were asking but for idle words. And I am convinced that if he had replied somewhat as follows: " What did I do in those twenty years when I was the most obscure of French musicians? I created the science of Harmony, and I learnt to compose music the like of which has never been heard," these words would have summed up, in his eyes, everything in the history of his personality that deserved to have any importance attached to it either by himself or by the world. In the same spirit, Descartes, if questioned on what had happened to him in Holland, in his " tub " to which he had retired might have replied, " I invented mathematical analysis and a system of the universe." It is their intellectual power that has led me to connect the names of these two men. Their temperaments also lend themselves to association. They are both solitaries. And they are not so from melancholy or natural misanthropy, but as the result of the extraordinary force of thought and imagination, which holds them fast in the dream and continual pursuit of the work to be created—

which holds them there, I would say, all the more firmly because that work has a strongly systematic character. They do not detest the society of men, but they habitually prefer the society of their ideas. They find the latter lively and the former wearisome, whereas with the generality of mortals the opposite is the case. The soliloquy to which they give themselves up has a passionate interest, an inexhaustible wealth of material, and the conversations and visits which tear them away bring them no adequate compensation, at least in the majority of cases. But is soliloquy the right word? The work that these superior mortals elaborate in their meditations and vigils is addressed to the human race, and is accomplished for the human race. Humanity will be eager for it, will delight in it; such work will form one of the instruments of its education, will become part of the heritage of civilisation. Let us not then call such men solitaries, it is they who have the wide strange of company; in their semi-seclusion they might be called the most ubiquitous and sociable of men. Too much intimacy with a few individuals would spoil for them that intimacy with humanity which alone contents their vast desire. Nothing could be more crowded than Rameau's long provincial solitude; perhaps to his neighbours he seemed aloof and preoccupied—but he was living with all those to whom the creations he was preparing would bring sunlight and enchantment.

In Paris, in the midst of the bustle of the town, the thousand claims upon an artist in the public eye, the intrigues of the world of theatres, we find him still the same man. He went unending solitary walks, striding along the paths in the public gardens apart, and if anyone forced him to speak to him he seemed,

we are told, " to be coming out of a sort of ecstasy."

Let us not on that account picture him as a figure of fun, a childlike, innocent dreamer, a stranger to everything but music, without action or defence in life. He was not that type at all. His abstraction is not the voluptuous slackness of an aesthete who dreads the harshness of human contact and the fatigue of business. It is the sympton of a strong and tenacious will that has a horror of scattered energies, and concentrates on the main issue, the *unum necessarium*. Business does not frighten him, and he handles briskly the men with whom he has dealings. He is known as a rugged character, energetic, imperious, brusque, even crushing. He makes the artists who have to perform his works tremble. At rehearsals " he used to sit in the pit, where he insisted on being alone ; if anyone came to see him there, he would wave him away without speaking to him or even looking at him." Here is another important detail—he was a miser ; his was a solid middle-class avarice, which growing on this stock of greatness and genius, stands out in high colours, and would have delighted Regnard and inspired his wit. But there is no reason to suppose that this avarice, even if it went somewhat beyond the limits of wisdom, ever reached a morbid stage. Nor must we confuse a certain harshness of character, a certain sententious and hard caustic quality of mind with the fancy picture of a brutal, thick-skinned, distorted character, barbarous husband and cruel father, painted by his enemies, notably Diderot, Grimm, and the Lyric writer Collé. This literary rabble is not worthy of credit ; obviously it is taking its revenge for hard blows, and for rejected opera libretti. One of Rameau's fellow citizens tells us

that "the vacuity he found in society made him neglect it," and the great man must have got quite used to administering drastic treatment to simpletons, fools, wind-bags and intriguers. He was, we cannot doubt it, a good straight man, and not lacking in kindness too; but of this he was very sparing, as he was of his money so gloriously earned. We have evidence of his generous help being given to artists whose talent interested hin.

He was a very tall man, and extremely thin, "which made him look," says Chabanon, "more like a ghost than a man." Grimm finds him "as emaciated and shrivelled as M. de Voltaire," whom he resembled in appearance, but without having his mischievous physiognomy. The expression of his face was severe, "all its features were big and announced the firmness of his character."

Voltaire and Rameau . . . There exists a contemporary engraving in which we see these two gaunt figures shaking hands and paying each other compliments. It is symbolic. They were beyond all doubt the two finest spirits of their age.

IV

Apart from the indications of Maret on the uncompleted studies of Rameau at the Jesuit college at Dijon, we possess no direct information about the musician's intellectual development, his favourite authors or his reading. But we must not let ourselves suppose that he gave no attention to the cultivation of his mind, and that music limited the horizon of his ideas. There is extant a letter of his which is valuable evidence on this subject. It was found among the

papers of the writer Houdar de la Motte, who was known as a successful librettist. Rameau, who was thinking of trying a theatrical venture, asks him for a " book," and seeks to inspire his confidence.

" When people speak of a learned musician," he writes, " they mean usually a man who has the various combinations of notes at his fingers' ends, but he is supposed to be so much absorbed in these combinations that he sacrifices everything to them,—good sense, sentiment, judgment, reason. Now such a man is merely a school musician, and of a school that deals with notes and nothing else ; and one may rightly prefer a musician who prides himself less on knowledge than on taste. And yet the latter, whose taste is only formed by comparisons that are within reach of his sensations, can at the best only excel in certain directions—I mean by that in directions that correspond to his temperament. Is he naturally tender ? Then he expresses tenderness. Is his temper quick, lively, jocular ?—His music follows suit. But take him out of these characters that are natural to him and you would not know him again. Moreover as he draws on his imagination for everything without any help from art in its relation to expression, he ends by exhausting himself. At the first kindling he blazed brilliantly, but the fire is diminishing every time he tries to re-light it, and one soon finds in him nothing but repetitions or platitudes. What one should seek therefore, for the theatre, is a musician *who has studied nature before painting her* and who by his knowledge has been able to choose colours and shades the relation of which with the required expressions is borne in upon him by his judgment and taste. . . Nature has not entirely denied me her gifts, and I have not

devoted myself to combinations of notes to the extent of forgetting their intimate connection with natural beauty."

The style of this passage is somewhat involved, but its sense is clear and strong, and its application singularly large. Let us put beside it this passage taken from the *Treatise on Harmony*:

"A good musician should throw himself into all the characters that he seeks to depict, and, like a clever actor, put himself in the speaker's place; he should imagine that he is in the places where the different events happen that he seeks to represent, and take the same share in them as the characters chiefly concerned; and he must be a good elocutionist at any rate internally."

These fine sentences remove, not only as regards Rameau himself, but generally, a prejudice that is too widely entertained against the intelligence of musicians. You will find many people quite ready to believe that genius of musical creation or interpretation is compatible with a poor development of this faculty, that a man may be a first class musician without having brains. That is almost a commonplace. But it is a profound mistake. At any rate this idea is no more true for music than for other arts. In so far as it is true at all it applies to all alike. In all ages one may find poets, painters and sculptors who combined with real talent a quite ordinary brain, occasionally even a weak one, lacking judgment and finding room for nonsense and fatuity. But such talent has always been of a petty kind, and has not gone far; it draws on a very limited capital; it has so to speak only one note, and having once produced it is condemned to repeat it constantly whatever the

subject chosen. When the note is too obviously ill-tuned to the subject, all such a talent can do is to force it, it can never find a fresh one. The terms employed by Rameau admirably characterise the trivial merits and huge inadequacy of talent without mental power. The fact that these terms are so general as to be applicable, as they stand and without any change whatever, to all arts can only strengthen their special authority in respect to music. The primordial virtue of good music is truth of expression, fidelity to nature. And, as Rameau says, the study of nature is not comprised within the special study of music ; the sense of the exact relation between the thing to be expressed musically and the formula of sound which will express it is a sense which a merely musical education does not give, and which one may say calls for the accuracy of the whole of a man's thought. There have been no truly great musicians who have not added to the special gifts of their art the capacity to ponder over humanity, human situations and human passions, in other words who have not possessed a generally superior brain. But it is abundantly clear that it is precisely those who have at their command a stock of the most extended, varied and richly shaded impressions, who have needed to wield the richest musical language and the resources of the most powerful and subtle technique. Power and delicacy of feeling do not render technical mastery and fertility unnecessary ; on the contrary they call for their highest development.

Such are Rameau's principles. They are admirable. They would still be so if he had lacked strength to apply them effectively in his own works. But in truth this hypothesis is contradictory. Rameau's

ideas on his art have a strong and sovereign quality just because he derives them from the experience of his own creative power. Suppose that his musical works had been lost, and that only his writings remained to us, we should say on reading them, "That man must have been a great creative genius."

V

Learned men and skilful writers on music such as Messrs. Lionel de la Laurencie and Laloz have given us very sound analyses drawn up in technical language of Rameau's musical work. In a book such as this, addressed to a public that is interested in music but not versed in the secrets of musical composition, it is rather by their expressive and poetic qualities that we must delineate the master's invention and manner of writing. An analysis which fastens on this aspect may be no less instructive and exact, especially if it does not refuse to make occasional reference to technique. However, I do not intend to give such an analysis of the whole of Rameau's works, far from it. His theatrical works were numerous. It is impossible and would be useless to go through them all. It will be better to choose one as a type, and follow it throughout its development, and then pick out in others the features necessary to complete the picture which this first study will have given us of the genius and inspirations of the artist.

Castor and Pollux is considered by most connoisseurs to be his masterpiece. It is a safe verdict if we take it to mean, not that there is more life, grandeur and grace in the musical invention of *Castor* than in that of *Hippolyte* or *Dardanus* but that of all Rameau's

dramatic productions *Castor* is the one which presents as a whole most unity, sequence, balance and harmony and the liveliest and best connected movement. For this merit we must to a great extent pay honour to the poem which cleverly attaches the ballet and spectacular portions to the action. The author of this poem is P. J. Bernard. Voltaire admired his *Castor*, finding in it " many glittering diamonds."

Like all Rameau's overtures, that of *Castor* is in two parts, the second being in the form of a fugue. The first, whose style is grave and accent vigorous, is a resounding appeal to the soul's heroic ideas and proudest impulses ; it forms the fitting prelude to a drama that glorifies the heroism of devotion and the sacrifice of passion in a higher cause. The fugue gives promise of the brilliant and gracious interludes which are to be introduced. It is a fugue in the French manner, wonderfully alive, without the slightest pedantic heaviness, swinging, rapid, sonorous, full of life and charged in every note with gaiety and vivacity.

The curtain rises on a mythological prologue, the nuptials of Venus and Mars, War yielding place to Pleasure. Rameau contrives to give a natural effect in scenes of this kind. In it the choreography and figuration are infused with dramatic animation ; the gods, goddesses and heroes appear in it each in a definite and distinct character, into which they throw themselves with charming simplicity, and take an active part in the scene. This gives the composer the opportunity of tempering the magnificence of the general effect with a great variety of delicate shades—I would mention particularly here :

(1) The " symphony " in C major announcing the descent of Venus and Mars on earth, two groups of

contrasted melodic fragments, the one suitably rendered by the sweet sound of flutes, the other coloured with the brightness of trumpets, but offering in their opposition (and here we have the touch of a great master) the unity and continuity of a single melody.

(2) The " rondeau gavotte " in A major, first played by the orchestra, then taken up by the voice to the words " Brighter return, O charming Peace." An admirable theme at once sinuous and simple in form ; a dance theme, but also like all Rameau's dance themes, a theme of sentiment, as it were the light step of a young woman who comes forward observing in her movements the purest cadence, and smiling with an enigmatically tender expression. She does not advance all at once. After each step she hesitates, stops just long enough to resume with yet more grace her movement as of one treading on air. Six times she thus suspends our enchantment the better to renew it, until at last she gives the finishing touch by completing with a wonderfully measured ease both her waving movement and the expression of her smile.

(3) The Minuet sung by Love, " Spring to life ye gifts of Flora ", one of the most divinely calm melodic tunes, one of the most serene expressions of pleasure, ever imagined by Rameau.

I would set beside this prologue the interlude in the third act, which has a similar inspiration. Jupiter, to dissuade Pollux from his purpose of offering himself to Pluto in the place of his brother Castor makes Earthly Pleasures appear before him. From among the posy of inspirations which once more the musician has here collected, we cannot but pick out that superb flower, the air for Hebe and her followers, in E major " Let our sports crown your prayers." It is a long melody, and

the pure regularity of its course, the absolute perfection of the symmetrical sections, seem almost miraculous, when one remembers that its development counts no less than twenty-three bars in triple time *moderato*. It surpasses, I think, all that I have quoted before. This too is a hymn to Pleasure, but there passes over it the breath of an emotion sacred to Lucrece.

VI

The dramatic subject of *Castor and Pollux* is the sacrifice of Pollux who renounces life on earth in order to bring back Castor from the realms below by taking his place. It is a cruel sacrifice, not on account of the joys and glory that earth offers in abundance to a demi-God—to these Pollux is not more attached than befits a lofty soul—but because of the beautiful Telaïre whom he loves. Telaïre had been in love with Castor, and while the latter yet lived Pollux was secretly in love with her. After his brother's death he dared to declare his love, and he felt the more emboldened to do so in that he had slain in a duel of vengeance Lincée the murderer of Castor, and brought the spoils of his victim to Telaïre. How could he fail to feel assured that such homage, added to the already decisive argument provided by Castor's decease, would win him the fair one? Alas, the faithful Telaïre is inflexible. Passionately attached to Castor beyond the tomb, she is far from accepting Pollux as his substitute but has quite another plan in view for him. Born of the same mother as Castor, but having Jupiter for his father, Pollux is more than a mortal; he can do what mortals cannot. Following the example of other heroes of antiquity he can penetrate to the realms below, and

take back from the master of those regions one of his victims and restore him to the light of day. In reply to the ardent declarations of Pollux, which she rejects with a subtly respectful grace, Telaïre demands of him this act of devotion. What is the love of a mere woman to him, a demigod? How can he attach such value to her? Glory is a far greater prize. And how it will shine down all the ages, the glory of this expedition to the world below!

But Telaïre knows not, nor does Pollux, to what conditions the performance of so high a deed is subject —the most terrible of conditions. The liberator of Castor will have to be his substitute with Pluto. He can enter those realms, but he cannot return. Jupiter, whose consent is necessary, reveals to his son the terrible law to which his purpose must submit. He leaves him free master of his decision, not without recalling to his mind and conjuring up before his eyes the charms of life. An agonising conflict takes place in the heart of Pollux. If he remained on earth, might not Telaïre change her mind? Would she persist eternally in her refusal? But fraternal love, chivalrous pride, and the lust of fame carry the day . . . As Pollux is approaching the entrance of the lower world, difficulties are put in his way by a character whom the author has not managed to incorporate very firmly in the action, though at certain moments she takes a very eloquent part in it; this is young Phoebe, who loves Pollux with an unrequited passion. She has mustered the peoples whom the hero governs to restrain him by their prayers and tears. Pollux does not let his resolve be weakened; he even scatters with sword strokes the crowd of furious demons who bar his way.

Castor dwelling in the happy shades is giving himself up to the charm of the Elysian fields and to melancholy thoughts of his earthly loves. Neither the fair prospect of a return to life, nor the pain that he feels on hearing that his brother, his liberator, is his rival, disturbs his sense of honour. He will not consent to the death of Pollux. He agrees to return to earth for one day only ; Mercury transports him thither. The extreme shortness of his happiness dashes with sadness the tender words that he exchanges with Telaïre in a pleasant Spartan glade. But as he is preparing to descend again to the shades, songs of joy burst forth. Jupiter, satisfied with the test, restores both brothers to life, and to reward their devotion promises that they shall have their place among the stars.

The poet Bernard has handled this theme in sparkling —often too sparkling—verses of the minor school of the 18th century, and in style that smacks of Ariosto rather than Racine—not that we would bring that up against him, for Ariosto may well be called the greatest of the poets of opera. Yet there is in *Castor* much that recalls Racine but it is Rameau's music that puts it there.

The interludes, dances and figures led up to by the development of the subject are as follows : in the first act the entrance of athletes and warriors, who celebrate by their games and songs the victory of Pollux over Lincée : in the second, the entrance of Hebe at the head of the Celestial Pleasures, holding in their hands garlands of flowers with which they seek to bind Pollux ; in the third the choruses and sarabands of demons who, to frighten Pollux, "emerge from the lower world through flames :" in the fourth the singing ballet of the Happy Shades ; in the fifth, by way of finale, the gathering of " stars, planets, satellites and gods " celebrating the glory of their new colleagues, Castor and Pollux.

In this slight sketch—and I am conscious of its weakness—I have tried to bring out the rich and deep poetry, the clever simplicity, the magnificent and delicate colouring of Rameau, painter of the lures and pleasures of life, of the feasts of Nature. Rameau as painter of warlike pageants, of the sports of athletes and soldiers, is just as great, perhaps more so. Perhaps Mars inspires him with even more life than Venus, and fills him with more enthusiasm. The interlude in the first act is extraordinary in its power and virile gaiety. In particular, the air for the athletes," sound forth, proud trumpets " is remarkable for a strength, a burst of rhythm, and a flame of melody to which I find nothing comparable in other masters. Handel himself, though he shews much genius in pictures of the kind, and though this heroic note is familiar to him, has not such vitality and directness. He puts into them a certain eleboration and solemnity : incontestable as is his greatness, he has not that French lightness and quickness of touch.

As to the purely dramatic part of *Castor*, I will choose among the countless comments to which it lends itself those that seem to me most significant.

Rameau's recitatives have been much criticised. They have been denounced for their dryness, their coldness, their formal and affected style, and their monotony. I am far from saying that Rameau has not in some instances given ground for these complaints. But as a generalisation they are absolutely false. The truth is that in this very difficult and delicate branch of dramatic art he has created undying models of expressive force. The type of recitative that he conceived and in many cases realised is an admirable thing, and Monteverde, though his genius of expression is profoundly different, is the only master whose art can be compared

in this department with Rameau's. In the work of the Italians from Pergolesi onwards, in Glück, Mozart and Rossini, in the Frenchmen of the first half of the nineteenth century, Recitative is presented as the part that is sacrificed ; it is employed in passages of subdued dramatic interest, where the lilt and lyric expression of the *air* are unsuitable ; and it is admitted that what befits these passages (at any rate in the absence of any thing better) is sung declamation, a chant more or less accentuated in its outlines, and accompanied by a few chords the object of which will be rather to sustain the voice than to make any real contribution to the expression. But *is* nothing better possible ?

Could not an effect be obtained intermediate between the musical vacuum proper to the recitatives of this school and the plenitude of music which distinguishes the airs ? Must one necessarily accept as an imperfection fatally inherent in opera this eternal alternation of void and fulness, of desert tracts and flowery oases, as repellent to the spectator as they are offensive to truth and nature ? I have mentioned Monteverde and Rameau as the two greatest operatic musicians who have been of the contrary opinion. I hasten to add that they were so because they could afford to be so, and they could afford it because they were incomparable masters in the handling of harmony. Except Mozart (who no doubt paid no great attention to this point) the exponents of the *recitativo secco*, whatever genius some of them may have shewn elsewhere, were far from equalling these two in this department, and that is why they were, as one may say, condemned to the *recitativo secco*.

The truth is that what properly belongs to recitative passages is the expression of sentiment, and fine shades

of sentiment. Now, if it is naturally the part of *melody* to convey sentiment in its stages of simplicity, pronounced determination, or frank expression, yet the subtle use of all the resources of *harmony* is necessary to render the fine shades of sentiment, because it is in the nature of harmony to provide countless shades—at least if the composer has the ability to use it as some have done. I am not running to extremes ; emphatically I do not say that the line of the melody, its divisions and the manner in which the words are spaced, are of minor importance ; but the movements of thought can only be thrown into relief by favour of a harmony that models itself on them continually. By the way in which they satisfy the above conditions the majority of the recitatives in *Castor* are to be counted among the finest things in music : they contain no less music than the airs, but it is music of another nature.

I will take as example the passage introducing the famous air " Sad preparations " with which it is connected by a celebrated modulation, where Telaïre begs Phoebe to leave her alone with her tears before the funeral monument of Pollux ; or again the mournful and proud replies of Pollux when his father reveals to him that to deliver Castor he must separate himself for ever from his loved one. Important considerations of propriety (the presence of a stranger, a woman, regard for the sovereignty and benignity of Jupiter) oblige the characters to give vent to their feelings only in a gentle and subdued fashion, though despair is in their hearts. Hence the necessity for Recitative. But mark how through the measured inflexions of the language the combinations and contrasts of an intense harmony modelled by a quivering hand are able to lay before us the most secret agitation of their hearts.

And how can I fail to dwell upon that marvel of marvels, the love scene in the fifth act between Castor and Telaïre? A love scene treated throughout in recitative, what a change both from the impotence of the *recitativo secco* and from the romantic eloquence to which we are accustomed! Rameau employed this method because truth required it. The two lovers are re-united only for a day. The hour that brings them together bids them also take their last farewell. How could they yield themselves to happy embraces, surrenders, or songs of passionate despair? Their souls are divided between ecstasy and utter heaviness. Other musicians, in some cases great ones, dealing with an analogous situation, have expressed successively and separately the two contrary feelings, giving free play in either direction to their eloquence, but they are false to Nature. Rameau follows Nature. He keeps to the true note of this state of mixed feelings, he represents the double current. Is his music thereby less moving? On the contrary it is more so, and in style far more lofty and appealing. Read and re-read those four immortal pages beginning at the words: "So heaven is touched at tenderest alarms" and on to these: "Alas, can I believe it? Faithless one, thine only boast to keep thy tryst with death!" Read those lines again: you will not weary of them. What rhythm, what stateliness, what judgment, what feeling, and what music! In modern music I know of long love duets, that have gained well-deserved fame, that fill the orchestra with music, the theatre with sound, and the audience with delirium. But how much would I prefer to have written just those four pages, that melodious murmur divinely touched with tenderness and grief!

It is the French manner. We must get back to it —if we can. It is not easy. It is infinitely difficult, It is the perfection of musical delicacy and exquisite feeling. But it is the French manner.

Wagner too found himself at grips with the problem of the Recitative. For Wagner's music is itself divided between recitatives and airs, as theatre music has been, is, and will be in all ages and in all countries, seeing that this division is absolutely inevitable. It is no less impossible to write dramatic music that shall not be a succession of recitatives and airs than it was for M. Jourdain to speak without uttering prose. But note, if it is impossible to conceive dramatico-musical utterance in which these functions are not fulfilled, yet they may be fulfilled under many different forms. The form which Wagner has chosen for his recitatives is not one of the things most to my taste in his art. In order to fill them with music (a praise-worthy object in itself) and avoid those awkward breaks of continuity between them and the singing parts, those shocks which certainly ought to be avoided, he makes their tissue out of fragments borrowed from the melodic themes of the work; these he develops, combines and elaborates according to the rules of counterpoint and symphony. I will not discuss here the value (very variable) of the results given by this procedure. What is certain is that for Frenchmen nothing could be more heavy, hampering, scholastic and crushing. Nothing could be more unsuited to our alert temperaments. The recitative that suits us is one that follows Nature with simplicity and has the lure of spontaneity of expression and of freshness due to continuous inventions. That is Rameau's way and it is, let me repeat, far more difficult to get hold of.

VII

Rameau's Airs are of two kinds, or one might better say of two degrees. The shorter ones offer an intermediate form between the Recitative and the airs on a larger scale. They coalesce with the recitative itself; they are inserted in its development and are as it were a more sustained phase of recitative. Free declamation gives place to song properly so called, but it is song that has its melodic movement so adjusted as not to contrast excessively with the declamation, and seems to be its natural sequel. The musician's tact has to tell him the exact points at which the utterance requires this slightly more elevated tone, this more rhythmic diction. Two airs, in the second scene of the first act, "Let your foe's fate . ." and "How poor a victory!" may be quoted as examples. The melodic restraint of these passages allows the same natural ease in the return to recitative.

This form is necessary to truth of expression in dramatic music. Its absence leaves an appreciable void and the liveliest musical pleasure experienced in other parts does not make up for the discomfort which this gap causes to any good judge. It disappeared from opera at the same time that there disappeared that great richness, that superabundance of musical resource employed in opera by the old Italians, such as Monteverde and Stradella, and by Rameau their true successor. We see the lack of it in the modern Italians, and one must add, in Glück, though this remark must not be taken as detracting from his genius. It disappeared at a time when a doctrine prevailed which made it a grievance against

Rameau that he put " too much music " in his operas. That " too much music " was just what rendered half tones possible, just as in painting it is only a rich palette that can introduce tone and graduation in the colouring. But does what allows of half-tones exclude the opportune application of strong and lively colours? Certainly not. Like all truly great artists Rameau has both. He draws from the same source his double superiority in delicate expression and in the vigorous inspirations of eloquence. If anyone ever knew how to put energy into music, it is he. He has no equal for feats of conciseness and strength, for the sudden frankness and overwhelming bursts of melodic spate. This boldness is the most striking characteristic of his airs of the second class, airs in the proper and full sense of the term. But what is so admirable is that thanks to the graduations these fine strong strokes come in perfectly naturally.

In the school with which I contrast him and which replaced him, the important kind of air only emerges after some preparation. The musical embellishments by which it is compulsorily introduced seem to be proclaiming that serious matters, great matters, are about to be uttered, and now it will be well worth while to listen. However successful and fine the air may be, this gives a shock, it shows favouritism, it almost asks for objectionable mannerisms from the interpreter both as actor and as singer. With Rameau, at any rate in his best work, there is nothing of this. The great expressions whether vocal or instrumental arise from the actual progress of the sentiment and of the dialogue, with such spontaneity that one feels their elevating effect without having, so to speak, noticed it. The listener is out on the ocean of music

without having been conscious of leaving the shore. The composer, carried away by the exaltation of the passion he is translating into music lets himself go and plies his tools joyfully on his material—Sound. He strikes it preferably at the most sensitive spots, those that answer the call with most sharpness, power and fulness ; I mean on those tonal notes, those perfect chords which weak or over-subtle musicians only dare approach with hesitation and equivocation, by roundabout ways, because the vagueness or generally blurred style of their utterance can only with difficulty support their sovran precision and clean cut effect. The great masters, on the other hand, in their strength, have always gloried in striking them, without petty precautions or beating about the bush—striking them again and again through long passages, in conformity with the robust decision and majestic gait of their thought. No one, not even the author of the Heroic Symphony and the Symphony in C Minor, has put more energy than Rameau into this familiar and superb handling of what might be called the fundamentals of the world of sound. Look at the reply of Pollux to Jupiter (Act II., Scene IV.) : " Oh, let me penetrate e'en to the sombre shores,"—that affirmation of resolution and youthful heroism. Its musical substance consists (at least one may say so with almost complete accuracy) in a sequence of six perfect chords ; this sequence's rhythm (itself repeated six times) by which the constituent notes of the chords sound again successively from the highest to the lowest, suffices to make it the most original, virile, proud and sturdy piece of music in the world. This remark with slight modifications might be extended to apply to many other passages, in particular

to those two airs absolutely different both from the one quoted above and from each other ; Phoebe's song of passion and vengeance at the beginning of the fifth act, or (Act. III., Scene III.) the rapid account of Telaïre's prophetic vision, " His chariot suddenly recoiled before me," a page as warmly coloured as it is full of movement, making one think of certain passages in the Rheingold. Always the perfect chord. Truly it is with that that music strikes her strongest blows. But is it not the " common ground " which provides the greatest orators and poets with their most striking passages ? What is paradoxical in the definition of " common ground " is that it is only within reach of exceptional abilities.

It is also to be noted that the observance of natural effects inspires in Rameau various methods of introducing airs. Sometimes he underlines their arrival by a touch of grandeur. Thus for " Sad preparations," Telaïre, left alone, can at last withdraw herself from the outside world, and give herself up to mournful meditation on her hero's death. A dignified modulation, the sudden appearance of a broad and very simple rhythm, a grave and pathetic prelude, mark this moment. Everyone knows the sublime song that follows, before whose beauty Diderot's anti-Rameau mania was subdued and the youthful Grétry's somewhat depreciatory envy was silenced. Everyone did I say ? Well, I thought so ! But let me repeat what one of our celebrated singers told me a short time ago. One day she had occasion to ask one of our equally celebrated conductors to accompany her on the piano in " Sad preparations." At the end, " That's a fine thing," exclaimed the worthy musician, " whose is it ? " He knew his Beethoven and his

Schumann by heart, but he didn't know who composed "Sad preparations." This little story is typical of a long period which the war and the victory of France will have brought to an end. The great thing is that our hero realised and admitted that it was fine. As to that I will make no further comment than to quote the remark of a friend of mine who has deep feeling for music, and knew nothing finer than, "I have lost my Eurydice." I gave him the opportunity of hearing "Sad preparations." He sought for words to express his exact sentiment,—"That," said he, "is on a higher plane."

Let that be understood as the expression of a comparison between these two pieces, and not of a general comparison between Rameau and Glück. We will not set the author of *Castor* before the author of *Armide*. These two great men are peers. And there are not wanting parallels where the second wins. To my thinking, the air in Castor at the beginning of Act 4, "Abode of eternal peace," is far from equalling the song of Orpheus greeting this same sojourn in the Elysian Fields, or the song of Renaud contemplating the gardens of Armida. On the other hand one may wonder whether Glück could have rendered with the same mixture of broad musical poetry and subtle touches Pollux's struggle of conscience at the beginning of Act II. "Nature, and Love, ye sharers of my heart, which of you twain shall be the conqueror?"

Having now treated of the recitatives and airs, we have next to consider the scenes and acts in their development. We know how important in dramatic art are the balance and good handling of these units. In musical dramatic art they require a special simplicity of treatment. In this respect *Castor* is a very

great success. The interludes which are interpolated in the drama, far from impairing its emotion, render it more beautiful and poetic. The poet has shown great cleverness. *Dardanus* may be quoted as marking the opposite defect. Its drama is very weak; its springs are mechanism rather than sentiment; it seems to be made for the interludes, not they for the drama. It is to be feared that in spite of a great deal of admirable music, it must have fallen flat on the stage. Rameau used to worry the life out of his librettists, by forcing them constantly to undo or reconstruct their text, but it seems to me that he exercised this very formidable censorship only on the prosody and detail of the words. As to the general conception he showed himself accommodating, and one certainly cannot consider he was wise in so doing, as he thereby to some extent injured the future of his work. But in *Hippolyte*, which like *Castor* is by Pellegrin (and by Pellegrin guided by Racine) he found in this way an excellent book. I might have chosen *Hippolyte* as the subject of an analysis intended to bring out the form that opera took in Rameau's hands. But *Castor* appears to me to be a more perfect whole. I find in the parts of Hippolyte and Phèdre an element of coldness and weakness, something of that forced effect with which the master is reproached. But I am far more impressed with the prodigious musical creations which that work contains—creations of a style quite wanting in *Castor*.

All those who know the score will know that I have specially in mind the second act, that of the world below, in which the power of evocation is blended with the grandeur of true tragedy:

" On us thy destiny hath cast a horrid spell.
Tremble! In terror quake! Poor wretch, what is thy goal ?
To leave behind the realms of hell
To find sheer hell within thy soul!"

Thus sing the Fates to Theseus, and one seems to feel the crime of Phaedra with its awful consequences stealthily following the unhappy hero along the dark ways of the nether abodes. Human tragedy adds its own colours to the colour that depicts the world below. When we reflect on the loftiness of style and the outburst of musical force that this act presents, one might say lets loose, at its opening, we are astounded to find the artist's power not only sustained but extended and increased right up to its conclusion. There are two elements opposing and warring with one another in this series of scenes : on the one hand the humanity, generosity, courage and tenderness of Theseus, and on the other the eternal callousness of the powers of Erebus and the avenging wrath of Pluto (*illacrimabilis Pluto*) ; and we marvel to find that the one element has been treated with no less force than the other. Each enhances the other. Then there is the " Trio of the Fates " singing together in solemn notes the prophetic malediction, while in the orchestra amidst the howling of the winds of hell, resounds the brazen voice of doom. One must know this trio if one would know how far the power of music can go. But it would not be what it is were it not followed by the magnificent and touching entreaty of Theseus : " Since Pluto is inflexible." Here it is no longer simple intervals and perfect chords that the musician employs. He throws forth in full flight a swarm of chromatics like Pluto setting loose devils. But handled with this power even chromatics have the firmness of the hardest metal. To find passages comparable to these

we must turn to the laments of Theseus in Act V, where he discovers his error and involuntary crime, "Great gods, with what remorse I feel myself distraught." The fine passage, "Since an eternal barrier lies between us," has heart-stirring melodic analogies with the farewells of Wotan.

For the purpose of completeness (completeness, that is, within the bounds of this slight study), we ought to point out the prominent features of Rameau's ballets as we have sought to do with his "tragedies"—for that is the significant name under which *Hippolyte*, *Castor*, and *Dardanus* were presented to his contemporaries. We should take as our type the "Heroic Ballet" of the *Indes Galantes*, abounding as it does in gracious and fresh beauties; its "first entrance" in particular has the charm of a fresco by Tiepolo. . . But however tempting it might be to set before the world the variety of the master's work, we should be afraid of lapsing into wearisome detail. It will be better, at the point we have now reached, to sum up our opinions in a few general remarks.

VIII

I have emphasised Rameau's high qualities of dramatic expression, because it often happens that they are not recognised, and he is represented as a great symphonist who strayed into opera. I think I have shewn on the contrary that the same basis of musical wealth from which his symphonic inspiration draws its nourishment, provides also the eloquence, variety and fine shades of his dramatic expression. If in the total of his work symphony seems to hold a

more important place than dramatic music, it is in the first place because his ballets are more numerous than his tragedies : it is also because in two out of his four tragedies, *Dardanus* and *Zoroastre*, the moral springs of the tragedy are too feebly conceived to rival the figurative and airy portion which gives scope for symphony properly so-called (in the latter I include dance music).

Rameau as symphonist is a match for the greatest. One has only to go through his scores to recognise that Mozart and Beethoven do not surpass him in invention. His work contains nothing like Beethoven's great contemplative adagios. But Beethoven has not his picturesque fancy—so sturdy and of such astonishing creative originality. The two are equal in force of enthusiasm. But if Beethoven's enthusiasm raises and organises far vaster sonorous masses, Rameau's throws out more brilliant flashes. That is only to say that Rameau is a Frenchman, a Frenchman of the eighteenth century, while Beethoven is of another race. If Rameau (beware, I am about to utter a blasphemy !)—if Rameau had written the finale of the ninth symphony, the Ode to Joy, he would never have made of it that extraordinary architecture of sounds, but on the other hand he would not have put that heaviness into it ; he would have really put more joy into it.

In any case this is not the comparison I wish to press ; I make it merely to indicate Rameau's rank, rather than to add another stroke to the portrait of a genius. A comparison between Rameau and Handel would be much more fruitful. They are exactly contemporary, and great as are the differences between them, one is conscious that they share a certain common

style belonging to European music that still shews traces of the seventeenth century. But I should like to draw attention to another analogy, more interesting and more instructive.

Rameau wrote operas largely blended with symphony. His symphonies are inspired by mythological and fabulous scenes, and these scenes it is their object to illustrate and bring to life in music. Now since his time there has been one other great musician, and only one, whose work presents precisely this aspect, and who has made the same kind of application of music. I mean Richard Wagner. Their mythologies are different. Rameau's mythology is borrowed from classic fable: the models of the figures who appear in it, of the landscapes in which the events take place, have been imagined and elaborated by the painters of Rome and Venice, so that it wears the halo of a long heritage of beauty. Wagnerian mythology is taken from German and Scandinavian fable, of which one may at least say (without of course refusing to recognise its attraction) that it comes nowhere near Greek fable either in taste or in intellectual appeal; and the scenic realisations of this element of the marvellous are far coarser and very far from adjusting themselves to the same degree of style. Nevertheless the work of the two composers belongs to branches of the art sufficiently similar to render somewhat ridiculous those critics who delight in the theatrical figures of Wagner, and relish in them the freshness of Nature, while they condemn those of Rameau as artificial and class them with all that is old fashioned and cast-off in art. Would they suggest that the Rhine maidens are a less *artificial conception than Diana and her

* Translator's note: The original says "more," but this is surely a slip.

huntresses or the Norns than the Parcae? And are not the latter infinitely nearer to us than the former, and far richer in meaning?

But what want bringing out are the analogies of musical feeling that correspond to the analogies between musical subjects. Rameau and Wagner have given to their symphonic music the character of real plastic creations. I am not saying that they are descriptive writers; that term would be weak, or rather the idea would be inaccurate. An act of the imagination is involved that is far deeper and stronger than description. In these masters the poetic impressions of spectacles of nature and fancy inspire musical forms that have as much boldness in rhythm as simplicity in melody, and shew a wonderful relief. They might well be called syntheses by music. "Rameau's music" as M. Lionel de la Laurencie so well says "seeks its end outside itself. It strives to paint, to express. It has an extra-musical function; it aims no doubt at translating human sentiments, but it aims also and especially at transposing spectacles and visions, at characterising their appearance and profound signification. That is where Rameau is a great, a magnificent musician. His themes present themselves to us with an astonishing clearness and firmness of outline. They have a marvellous precision, a definitive quality. Their tonal clarity is perfect and their character clearly shewn." These features would apply, with a shade (but an important shade) of difference to the more famous symphonic themes of the *Tetralogy*. The difference is that the latter have in their splendour a certain heaviness, though a heaviness that suits them. We prefer Rameau's light material. It is of no less good quality.

In any case the comparison is confined to these figures of sound The methods by wh ch the two masters develop them are as different as possible. We realise easily what an immense gulf lies between them as far as the dramatic aspect and human expression are concerned :—the same gulf which is seen to separate the heroes of noblest poetic and literary origin who fill Rameau's theatre, and the colossal but scarcely living figures, half men and half elements, which furnish the characters of the Wagnerian dramas.

Work such as Rameau's belongs not merely to the history of Music. It has its place in the general history of Taste, in the history of Civilisation. Considered from this point of view, the author of *Castor* appears to us as one of the most imposing figures in art that France has ever produced. A harmonious quality of nature, or one might better say, of formation, unites in his personality the features of two great periods, the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century. From the seventeenth he draws the tone of pride, grandeur, nobility, the vigour and rhetorical fulness, which form the most striking feature of his style ; also his dominant concern for clarity, precision, fixity, and symmetrical order of form ; also the learning that exacts a kind of exactitude and mathematical perfection in the realisation of beauty ; also, and lastly, the dignity of tragic tone which he assumes without effort at the right moment. All these features affiliate him rather to Bossuet, Descartes, and Racine than to Voltaire. But in one point he is unique ; that is that he contrived in that language which has the grandeur of another century (a century far superior in respect of art) to express his own century. He has conveyed into his music the sensibility and imagination

of his contemporaries. Their dreams have found an interpreter in him—dreams of life according to Nature, of pastoral innocence, of charm in sensual joys, of grace and lightness in passion, of happiness through the daintiness and radiation of pleasure. This moral and poetical ideal is reflected in his works with the same sweetness and light as in the paintings of Watteau and Fragonard. Does it follow that he was personally 'ed captive, or intimately imbued with this idea', that he was subject to the sentiments and desires that he clothed with such beautiful expression, that he yielded himself up to them, and shared the intoxication of them? Here a fine distinction must be made. In temperament as in brain, Rameau belongs to another period. He is a bourgeois of the old school, positive and severe, of Cartesian education, the very last man to run after sentimental will o' the wisps and idyllic illusions. In that lofty and firm soul there is no nook for pastorals. But he is a very great artist with a quick and piercing eye, quick at probing the meaning of what lies around him, seizing passionately its appeal and grace, transforming it into rich material for his art, and appreciating it rather with the heart than the intellect. Oue might compare him to one of those great painters, of whom France has had many, who have come to Paris from their villages, and there, in the midst of their fame have preserved (not without a whimsical satisfaction) their rough peasant ways, the burrs of the backwoods—and yet they have had no equals for realising on canvas the poetry of supreme elegance in woman. So stands Rameau to the idyllism of the eighteenth century. It is a barbaric error (and the barbarism comes from Germany), that of a certain contemporary school,

who maintain that an artist must identify himself with the spiritual conditions that he translates—that he must experience them within himself, in a sense "live" them. On the contrary he must dominate them, must see them from a height; only thus can he sound them deeply and get out of them what they contain of general humanity. It is in this higher way, with this independence and serenity, that Rameau, as it seems to me, shared the sensibility of his age. It is just in that that he was a great poet. He was the great poet that music gave to the eighteenth century, a century which according to a commonly received (and indeed true) opinion could find none in literature.

Rameau gained for himself this high place because in the midst of that delightful century he retained the stamp of a stronger age.

IX

I come now to Rameau's enemies and the campaign waged against him by Rousseau, Diderot, and Grimm, the encyclopaedic party. Later we find Rousseau quarrelling with the enclopaedists, but at this period there was ostensibly a warm friendship between him and them.

This war was not the first that Rameau had had to undergo. At the time of his first appearance in the theatrical world he had found himself vigorously attacked by the party of Lulli. It was just the hostility of old Corneille's partisans against young Racine over again.

Every great artist has at first been confronted with this resistance from a public that is shocked by the

novelty of his expression. Rameau was all the more sure of overcoming it because so far from seeking to dethrone the Florentine, he proclaimed him, and with justice, his master and guide. His art, compared with Lulli's, had nothing revolutionary about it ; it was a continuation of Lulli. It was the art of Lulli with a very great advance in musical richness, variety, suppleness and colour. It was the musical tragedy of Lulli resumed by an artist who joined to a poetic genius at least as fine and an equally lofty sense of expression, the advantage of being a greater musician and far more fertile in resource. People were not used to this copiousness of invention, all this magnificent stream of music ; at first the ears of theatre-goers were stunned and bewildered by them. But they soon recovered, and Rameau had his devoted admirers

The attacks of which I shall now speak were far less honest. Personal feeling, the spirit of clique and intrigue, had far more to do with them than loyal and disinterested conviction. It is practically impossible to accuse Jean Jacques of bad faith in his pamphlet against Rameau ; for to shew bad faith one must be capable of good faith, and of such a character as Jean Jacques one may say indifferently that he always shewed good faith or that he never did so. At any rate when we examine without prejudice the substance of the objections that he raises to Rameau's teaching, we are certainly compelled to recognise their purely artificial and fictitious quality. Before a cool judgment on which wild blows of verbiage and irrelevant displays had no effect, Jean Jacques would have cut a contemptible figure, if forced to set out the objective reasons that led him thus to discredit the musician.

We will deal presently with the motives which led

Diderot, Grimm, and even d'Alembert to join the cry We must devote ourselves first to the part played by Rousseau, the ringleader of this orchestra in full blast ; by the rumpus produced the whole thing might have been an affair of state. As leader Rousseau was himself led away by the gloomy resentment of his pride, his ideas of persecution and his delusions.

He had begun by shewing for Rameau an admiration of which there is abundant evidence. He recognised his genius as a theorist, acknowledged in him the true creator of the synthesis and classification of harmony. He was equally appreciative of his operas, and praised their power of pathetic expression, richness of harmonisation and colour. These eulogies, which have special reference to *Dardanus*, the *Indes galantes* and *Hippolyte*, occur in a comparison of French and Italian music ; this has not been published, but M. Tiersot after studying it in manuscript, gives us an analysis of it. In this comparison Italian music is put far below French music. Rousseau allows the former the credit of " fine sounds " and of brilliant melodic artifices such as refrains, repetitions, glides and vocalisations, but as for sentiment he finds it " frozen " and says that only French music can touch the heart. The amusing thing is that the great attack upon Rameau which is two or three years later than this little document, is also presented in the form of a comparison between French and Italian music, and that practically one has only to interchange the characteristics which Jean Jacques had previously attributed to them respectively, to get the drift of his new criticisms. But French music is worse treated than the Italian had been. It is now the French music which is frozen and repulsive in its insipidity ; it has not even the " fine sounds ".

It must indeed be admitted that Rameau had done all that it lay in him to do to bring the storm upon himself. Rousseau had respectfully asked him to examine the score of the *Muses galantes* (his first musical work), but the master excused himself because the reading of scores wearied him. He consented however to hear some extracts from this comic opera performed at the house of M. de la Popelinière. The experiment was disastrous, a fact of which one can have no doubt inasmuch as the accounts of the scene given by the two interested parties agree even in the smallest details. Rameau explained that some of these pieces were by a consummate artist, while others were by an ignoramus who simply didn't know Music, and he concluded by stating baldly that what was good had been stolen.

It is obvious that he was wrong in not being civil, especially towards a morbidly irritable man. But the question that interests posterity is whether he was right in his judgment. We cannot refer to the text of the *Muses galantes*, as the score has not come down to us. But we have the observations of Jean-Jacques, which throw all the light that is necessary on the matter. " It is quite true," he writes, " that my work, being unequal and not conforming to rules was sometimes sublime and sometimes very flat ; that must be the case with anyone who soars only on occasional bursts of genius, and is not sustained by science." Is that true ? ... . No, it is not true, at least as Rousseau states it ; it cannot be true. It is as impossible without science to write fragments of sublime music, as it is impossible to make discoveries in higher mathematics without a mastery of the elements. Intention does not make power, and power only comes from sufficient studies. With the finest natural

gifts, but without studies, a man's most interesting work will be half spoilt, a state of things that is incompatible with the sublime. Moreover the distinction which Rameau drew was not between the " sublime " and the " flat," but between pieces that were very well constructed and pieces without form. That is quite another matter. Here, again, we have only to listen to the " confessions." " There only remained some accompaniments and some filling in to be done. This drudgery was very wearisome to me. I suggested to Philidor that he should undertake it, offering him part of the proceeds, He came twice, and did some filling-in in the act of " *Ovide* " ; but he could not tie himself down to this laborious work for a distant and even uncertain profit. He came no more, and I finished my task myself." I fancy that to anyone who can read the position is sufficiently clear. But for musicians its clarity is blinding. The pieces that Rameau had thought good were those which Philidor, one of the best musicians of his age, had furbished up.

It may be admitted that Rameau had gone rather far. We can understand that the personality of Jean-Jacques, being such as we know it to have been, must have got on his nerves. But if he had given a little more attention and kindly consideration to the subject, he would not have crushed him with this summary accusation of theft.

He would have recognised that even in the work of Philidor Jean-Jacques had his share. As I have said, we no longer possess the *Muses galantes.* But we have the *Village Seer,* which must have been composed after the same fashion. Now, without entering into the detail (though I am not ignorant of it) of the numerous controversies to which the question of the

authenticity of the *Seer* has given rise, and of the solutions that have been found, I venture to state as a certainty that some professional musician or other must have set his hand to this work to make it capable of rendition, but that its happiest and most characteristic melodies are the work of Jean-Jacques. Nature had not denied him a certain gift of melodic invention. He could invent pretty airs of a sentimental, simple and rustic turn. But he was assuredly incapable of embodying his ideas in a composition of wider scope. He had no musical education. He had never worked. He had read Rameau's *Treatise* with sufficient care to be able to give an approximately correct summary of it in some articles of the Encyclopaedia, but this could not make up for his lack of practical apprenticeship. For want of such apprenticeship not only did he not know how to compose, but the very notion of musical composition had remained a stranger to him. On that he had only the most superficial, puny, and even false ideas. The terms in which he speaks of Philidor's collaboration would be enough to prove it. To talk of accompaniments as drudgery is a scandal, a gross heresy. With all his gift as a melodist, Jean-Jacques was not only no musician ; he was not in reality even a judge of the art, or an expert to be taken seriously. But that was not going to stop him from treating of it very doctorally in his *Letter on French Music*, in which he issues in a tone of resounding decision and oracular authority the decrees of his own incompetence.

The execution at La Popelinière's house—an execution in both senses of the word—had taken place in 1744. The great attack upon Rameau was made in 1752. The comparatively long interval between these

dates might lead one to suppose that the resentment he cherished did not enter into the matter. And what might confirm this opinion is that the unpublished writing in which Rameau is praised dates from the year 1750. But a little phychology will perhaps dissipate these illusions, A feeling of rancour may ferment and accumulate for a long time internally before it manifests itself outwardly; internally too, the mind in which this feeling has been sown may bide its time, before letting it grow and frankly giving way to it, until means are available for its satisfaction; the spring of passion, till then restrained and softened by impotency, is suddenly released, and for the flabby inclination for vengeance is substituted a firm resolve. This moral interpretation as applied to Jean-Jacques will grieve those for whom he is a saint, and I do not offer it as self-evident. But at least it is impossible to deny its agreement with facts. In 1744 Jean-Jacques is an obscure individual, and Rameau the prince of French music. In 1752 Rousseau is a celebrated writer, upheld by friends and by a party, while on the other hand, an artistic event has occurred which seems to have withdrawn from the great musician the favour of an important section of the public. That is the moment chosen by Jean-Jacques for attacking him. That event was the famous "Opéra-bouffe War."

X

The performances given by the Italian opéra-bouffe company at the Opera in the winter of 1752 were enormously successful. Among the dozen works produced, of which the majority are to day either

totally forgotten or lost, there was at least one masterpiece, the *Servant Mistress* of Pergolesi, which had already been given in Paris in 1746, and had been only partially successful. This craze brought into fashion the comparison between French and Italian music, or rather brought it back; since for half a century the fancy of amateurs had been more than once employed on this subject; one may mention especially its treatment in the *Letters* of the president de Brosses. Jean Jacques followed the stream, and he, too, made a comparison of the French and the Italians. But he compared them as one compares evil with good, death with life, or hell with heaven.

"I think I have made it clear that there is neither time nor melody in French music, because the language is not capable of them; that French singing is nothing but a continuous barking, unbearable to any ear that is not trained to it; that its harmony is dull, without expression, and smacking only of pedantic padding; that French airs are no airs and French recitative no recitative. From which I conclude that the French have no music, and can have none; or that if they ever have any it will be all the worse for them."

It was for the sake of this conclusion—this explosion, that the whole piece, the celebrated *Letters on French Music* had been written. And the object that Rousseau there caricatured under the name of French music was precisely the music of Rameau's operas.

Only a simpleton would think it worth while to go into the details of the arguments on which Rousseau was proud to base his maniacal doctrine—the kind of deduction, for example, extraordinary in its subtlety and *a priori* method, by which he proves that the music

of the French can have no time, or again his theory on incomplete chords and harmonic padding, which would make a schoolboy laugh, while Rameau refused to reply otherwise than by a shrug of the shoulders.

More deserving of attention is his comparison between the languages, from the point of view of their respective sonority. He states, what is obviously true, that Italian lends itself far better to singing. Must we draw from that the conclusion that French refuses to be sung, and necessarily renders singing indistinct and harsh? Let us put it at its worst, and admit that German is to French, in respect of natural harmony, what French is to Italian. The songs of Schubert and Schumann sung in German, have a great deal of charm, and it is disagreeable to hear them in another language after receiving one's first impression of them in the original. The fact is that a music closely associated with its words by the double tie of fitness of sentiment and prosodic accuracy (with words of course that have been well chosen) communicates to them all the sonority that can be desired. Can anything sound finer than "Sad Preparations"?

Rousseau is not anxious to contrast French and Italian music in general. Little as he knows of the subject, he knows enough not to be unaware that the reasons for which he rejects Rameau would be equally applicable to the Italians of a past, but still quite recent, age, such as Monteverde, Stradella, Carissimi and others, not to mention Lulli, whom he makes a Frenchman. Rameau's musical formation and conception affiliate him to these great masters, and if his art is profoundly French, if it is French as the work of Descartes and Racine was French, yet this

national character is allied to traces no less deep of Italian seventeenth century influences. Rameau's music and the old Italian music are two provinces of the same kingdom rather than two independent kingdoms. Rousseau therefore is covering both in the same condemnation ; here are some expressions of the horror with which they inspired him at this period : " ridiculous emphasis of harmonic science ; pedantic pretension of learning ; music that is methodical but without genius, invention or taste."

" All this, which only succeeds in making a noise, like the majority of our much admired choirs, is alike unworthy to occupy the pen of a man of talent and the attention of a man of taste. As regards the counter fugues, double fugues, reversed fugues, ground basses, and other difficult follies which the ear cannot endure and reason cannot justify, they are obviously the relics of barbarism and bad taste ; like the porches of our gothic churches, they continue to exist only to the shame of those who had the patience to make them."

But Frenchmen would no longer put up with all this, because in the year of grace 1752 opéra-bouffe had come to open their ears. Italian ears had had to begin by getting themselves opened first. The formal thesis of Rousseau is that this came to pass from the day when France lost all influence on the Italian musicians. It was the French element that spoilt the natural gifts of Italy, because in music all that is anti-musical is French. The two terms are interchangeable.

I have dealt at too great length with Rameau for it to be necessary for me to defend him against this attempted travesty. The reproach of treating music as a scholastic and pedantic exercise often falls on

people who deserve it, and it is perhaps the worst reproach one can incur. But very often also it is the alibi under which a taste too mediocre, too clumsy and too little sensitive to seize the sense of a rich and delicately expressive music, hides itself and seeks its revenge. Then it cries down pedantry and the abuse of science, it cries down the fugue. After all it is surprising to find Jean-Jacques making himself the mouthpiece of this lack of understanding, this semi-inertia of feeling, and upsetting all the accepted notions of art merely to set up such a disposition as the real judge and sovereign umpire of good music. Is he sincere? It was quite recently that he had admired the *Indes galantes* as "containing more harmony than all the Italian operas put together." Now this harmony has become for him "emphasis on harmonic science." But let us not embark on the question of sincerity in the case of Jean-Jacques! The fact is that what he, aided by his obsession and craze, finds charming in the music of the opéra-bouffe is (side by side with the undoubted delicacy of some of its examples) its decadent tendencies. For there is a decadence of Italian music which begins at this period, a decadence destined to last a very long time, to be brilliant, and have its masterpieces and its examples of genius, only finally to lead the music of Italy to the state of perdition in which we find it at the present day. Of what does this decadence consist? Of impoverishment of writing and of musical style, of the emancipation of melody, which henceforth ceases to attach itself to the fine shades of truth and expression, and is concerned only with the sensual pleasures of the *bel canto* That is what Rousseau exalts in opposition to Rameau, and I

believe that, if at first his resentment contributed to form his convictions, yet these convictions soon become sincere. Jean-Jacques' languishing and sluggard sensibility was bound after all to take more pleasure in this method of expression, a method at once violent and loose. He thought he saw " Nature " in it—and his gossip Diderot had no difficulty in toeing the line with him.

In spite of its radical inconsistency, the manifesto of Jean-Jacques had most unfortunate results. In this world the violence of passion when combined with power of declamation often compensates for a dearth of ideas. This blazing and barbarous invective against French music by a great writer disturbed men's minds. Too many people in Europe were only too glad to run down anything French. Such people cheered for Jean-Jacques and greeted him as a liberator. The worst consequence was that a destructive doubt of the aptitude of Frenchmen for music entered the mind of the French themselves, and largely tended to drive them into excesses of imitation, to lead astray the musicians of our country and weaken in our music the sap and flavour of its native growth. Music is an international language, subject everywhere to the rules of the same syntax ; consequently, if there is a domain in which each country can profitably take lessons from other countries and be the richer for it, it is Music. But this acceptance of influence ought not to extend to the absorption of personality, above all when the latter is so magnificent and precious as was the musical personality of France. No one has done so much as Jean-Jacques to make our artists lose the sense of this gift. If we have given ourselves up, not without great loss to our creative vigour, to the

unrestrained invasion of musical Italianism and afterwards of Germanism, it was he who was the great promoter and prophet of this betrayal. That falsest of ideas, the idea that Nature has refused to Frenchmen the gift of expressing themselves in music, comes from the citizen of Geneva. Let us reflect for a moment on what this idea implies. It assumes in effect that the universal qualities of reason, taste and feeling as employed by the French in literature and the other arts, cannot find employment in music, that there is some natural incompatibility between these superior qualities and music. That would be a serious inferiority for music. But let us be reassured ; to attribute this inferiority to music, as Jean-Jacques implicitly did, is a calumny.

By a sequence of ideas which has nothing contradictory in it, Jean-Jacques, while denying to the French the faculty of musical expression, exalted to excess the spirit of musical nationalism in other nations. He spoke of Italian music as an independent plant which had everything to gain in growth and beauty by keeping itself absolutely untouched by the breath of the outside world, and which must provide entirely for its own nourishment and development if it would not spoil its fruits. But if that is true of Italian music the same must logically be said of German music, Russian music, and the music of every nation. And thus we see the destruction of that common spirit, that great common style of the older European music, of which Mozart and Beethoven still furnish examples, and of which the dissolution was to occur at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Jean-Jacques was the active worker of this ruin. And it is, I should say, very significant that the same murderous blows

which he directed against French national art strike home to the fine unity that had been realised in the music of Europe. But is that the only sphere in which all that is done against France is done against Europe?

Rousseau at the time of this quarrel was involved in the Encyclopaedic group, if not by the basis of his ideas, at any rate by his personal friendships, and above all by the presence of his name among the collaborators in that work. Party spirit (that scourge of letters) was very strong and uncompromising in the group which was obliged to defend its enterprise and its very existence against powerful enemies. "One for all, and all for one," an excellent principle as long as no one says or does anything foolish.

But with a Rousseau on the list it would have been idle to expect this discretion. Diderot, who had himself judged Rameau very justly in a passage of the *Bijoux indiscrets* (1748), where he compares him with Lulli, sang in chorus with Jean-Jacques, and did so with his customary thoroughness. It is true that the work from which I quote the following criticism is posthumous; it is the celebrated *Rameau's Nephew*, that farrago so much admired in Germany; its first ten pages are dazzling, and the remainder utterly wearisome. But it shews us the tone and drift of the opinions which this indefatigable talker must have aired in Paris when war was declared on the musician:

"It was Rameau (the nephew) pupil of the celebrated Rameau who delivered us from the plainsong that we had been droning for more than a century, who wrote so many unintelligible visions and apocalyptic truths on the theory of music whereof neither he nor anyone else could make out the meaning, and from whom we have a certain number of operas containing harmony,

scraps of song, frayed ideas, noise, flights, triumph, rushes, murmurs, gasping victories, dance airs that are to last for ever, which after superseding the *Florentine* will be superseded by the Italian virtuosi. He had a presentiment of this which made him dark and gloomy and surly, for no one is so peevish—not even a pretty woman who gets up in the morning with a pimple on her nose—as an author doomed to survive his reputation, witness Marivaux and the younger Crébillon."

One might call this an ingenious piece of spoof.

D'Alembert intervened in a second phase of the contest. Rameau, not willing to let Rousseau have the last word, had published a vigorous pamphlet against *Musical Errors in the Encyclopædia*, the musical articles being by Rousseau. To do this was to lay his hand on the Holy of Holies. D'Alembert wrote a reply ; Rameau retorted and exposed himself to the enemy. He was getting old, and, irritated by this campaign, was no longer quite master of his ideas. He imprudently mixed metaphysics with his music. He said that music was the foundation of geometry and the mother of all sciences. D' Alembert handled somewhat roughly these extravagances of an obstinate old man.

XI

The turn of the tide began about twenty years ago, in the resurrection of Rameau who had lain buried throughout the nineteenth century under the waves of the successive invasions of musical Italianism and Germanism. Credit for this is due to the initiative of Charles Borde and M. Vincent d'Indy, who had numer-

ous large portions of the master's work performed at the concerts of La Schola. Credit is due too to M. Saint-Saëns, who undertook the complete edition published by Durand, and had as his collaborators in this task musicians chosen from among the best in France, Vincent d'Indy, Paul Dukas, Claude Debussy, Alexandre Guilmant, Georges Marty, Auguste Chapuis, Reynaldo Hahn, Henri Büsser. The brilliance and varied significance of these names proves what rallying power, what virtue as a banner, is still possessed by the name of the author of *Hippolytus* : his cause is the cause of French classicism. There is no question, in exalting Rameau, of driving the musicians of later generations to cultivate archaism by direct imitation of his forms. Nothing could be more unreasonable. What is sought is rather to lead them back to grandeur, nobility and simplicity of taste, to elevate their sense of art, to help them to set their feet again firmly and completely on the highway of the great natural French manner.

But the existence of a fine edition is a small thing if it does not result in the conquest of public taste, that is to say, in the regular installation of Rameau in the repertories of our concerts and theatres. We must begin with concerts. Modern theatrical conditions hardly allow of a presentation of Rameau's operas that would respect the features that make its strength and beauty.

On the other hand, what is immediately possible and extremely desirable is that Rameau should take an important place in our Sunday concerts, at Lamoureux', at Colonne's and the Conservatoire. What was done for Wagner twenty and thirty years ago must be done for Rameau ; extensive selections and long suites from

his works should be performed. Even supposing the musical public were, for some weeks or some months, puzzled by a style so far removed from what they are now accustomed to, a little persistence and perseverance is all that would be required. It was forthcoming for the German Wagner, and it will be forthcoming for the Frenchman Rameau.*

To tell the truth this necessity of a period of resistance, experiment and initiation, has no terrors for me. On the contrary my conviction is that prompt and magnificent success awaits the musical society that sets out upon this royal road. To-day is not yesterday: tomorrow will be less so. But for the achievement of these great victories, the superior quality of the executants, the precision and discipline of the execution will not go far, unless the soul of an enthusiast penetrate and inspire with its breath the glowing mass of sound. What will be needed is the soul of a leader, who has not been so weighed down by twenty years' servitude in German music, as to be unable to glow with enthusiasm for this music that is so light and so living in its splendour. If this condition be realised, the public after hearing one or two acts of *Castor* or *Dardanus*, the second or the fifth act of *Hippolytus*, or the first chorus of the *Indes Galantes*, or any of many other pieces taken from the vast treasure house of airs, dances and descriptive pages, will not merely applaud ; it will be roused.

I have no misgivings. Our conductors ask nothing better than to be turned in this direction. It is true

* It is clear that in view of the size of modern concert halls and the orchestral mass now found necessary, some amplifications would have to be made in the scoring, though these must respect the character of the master's work. But we have plenty of clever people at the present day who could undertake this delicate task.

that except at the Conservatoire where the establishment includes a choir, they will have to add to their budget the expenses of a choral body.

They will be encouraged by the fact that concert halls without choirs are of necessity favourable to Germany and unfavourable to France, seeing that, with the exception of Wagner, the masterpieces of German music are symphonic, whereas the masterpieces of French music comprise for the most part the vocal, that is the human, element.

"Rameau as operatic symphonist" wrote his contemporary Chabanon, "never had a model or a rival, and we do not hesitate to affirm boldly that after all the revolutions that art may undergo in the future—when it has been brought to the highest perfection by no matter what nation—even then it will be a difficult task to equal our artist in this respect and to deserve a place beside him." This magnificent eulogy, adds M. Laloz, from whom I borrow the quotation, appears to be deserved ; at any rate nothing up to the present day has invalidated it. The dance music and the descriptive music (I would add numerous dramatic pages that are so closely bound up with the descriptive pieces that they form one fabric with them) shine with untarnished brilliance. Time which has dimmed so many glories seems to have added to the beauty of his work, effacing from it what his contemporaries found over bold and rendering it clearer and more harmonious. Of all these compositions nothing has grown old, whereas Beethoven, Schubert, Berlioz, Liszt, Wagner and César Franck, offer many pages or phrases that are out of date.

I thoroughly agree with the eminent critic, without however being able to admit the explanation which

he gives of these different destinies. "Nothing," he says "loses its freshness so soon as a lyrical effusion, be it the most touching imaginable, for nothing changes so rapidly as our mode of life. *It is by abstaining from appearing in his own work* that Rameau has assured for himself the greatest chance of immortality." It would seem to result from this theory, which is inspired by certain aesthetic formulae of Flaubert, that Rameau is assured of immortality because his inspiration is cold, and because he has expressed a void. But indeed what can one express by the arts, and especially in music, if one does not express the human heart? And how can man know the human heart but from himself? It would be truer, I think, to say that Rameau has expressed the same sentiments as all musicians and all poets, but that he has expressed them in their permanent and general aspects, and that it is this underlying generality that alone renders possible the perfection of a form capable of defying Time.

CHAPTER III

THE MODERN ITALIANS

Our fathers were passionately devoted to Rossini. They were not wrong. To a large extent I share their feelings. And yet Rossini's influence has been on the whole harmful to our composers, because they have yielded to it without discernment. What may be said on this subject is applicable also to the influence exercised by his juniors in glory, such as Bellini and Donizetti, and speaking generally is applicable to the long reign of musical Italianism in France.

I

The Italians cultivated the *bel canto*. Their cult of it certainly amounted to an abuse. But for them the abuse began at a far more advanced stage than in the case of a French composer. For Italians as for Frenchmen, the search after a fine vocal phrase is a fault in proportion as it is carried out to the detriment of truth and nobility of expression. But when a musican is an Italian and possesses genius, the right expression comes to him naturally in the form of *bel canto*. (I mean by right expression that which unites with pathetic accent grace or nobility of form). Such is the divine gift of these born singers. Tears, laughter, complaints, sighs, defeat and triumph, blessing and cursing, all these mean for them song, melodious song, and the spring of emotion flows into a phrase that carries the voice to perfection, and sustains and favours the expansion of its peculiar beauty.

As will be readily imagined, I am thinking only of the greatest musicians ; no one will suppose that I allude to the abominably degenerate Italian or pseudo-Italian school of to-day. I am thinking of the great musicians, and of them at their moments of inspiration, of genius. Take that celebrated passage in *William Tell*, with which one of the sublime scenes of that work opens ; " His days which they have dared to number." It is a model of fitting declamation ; the grief and remorse of a proud soul tortured by the shame of weakness could not possibly be expressed in accents of greater strength, conviction, or dignity. Moreover the phrase is given out like an incomparable vocal rocket ; it is one of the most marvellous tenor phrases that can be found. What a spell it weaves !

Frenchmen, even southern Frenchmen, cannot do that. They have tried and failed. They always will fail. It is a matter of sensibility, of race. The *Muette de Portici*, a work famous in its day, the nearest to Rossini that we have, enables us to put our finger on this truth. It is Rossini, Rossini with something mechanical about it. It has the necessary swing, but not the spell, not the inward deep musicality. The velvet softness, the grace, the sweetness and charm have faded out of it. It is delicate but dry.

Similarly, that extreme vigour of dramatico-musical movement, that captivating vivacity in what I would call the scenic arrangement of music, these are charms that our composers might try in vain to realise to the same degree as do Rossini and Verdi in their finest works. In these great masters such qualities may be traced to a certain manner of feeling, an inward energy. Our musicians could never even try to catch that style without appearing absurd, insincere, exaggerated,

strained, or without wasting in the effort their real strength. The French character requires a more temperate mode of expression, more analytical, one that brings out more fine shades and, if I dare say so, more ideas in each sentiment. In our literary classical theatre, the dialogue of the characters with one another is accompanied by the internal dialogue of each character with himself. It cannot be otherwise in a good French opera—Rameau, the Racine of music, has given imcomparable examples of this touching musical psychology; it does not indeed exclude in his case, and never should exclude, beauty from the lines (see the monologue of Theseus in the last act of the *Hippolytus*), but we may admit that it cannot clothe itself with that sensuous richness, that fine rapture of movement which are peculiar to Italian music. To each their own virtues. I would add—to each the virtues of others, in so far as they can enrich their own without destroying them. The hangers-on of Wagner pooh-pooh the Italians, and they are fools to do so. And yet no one was more steeped in the work of the Italians than their god, and he borrowed largely from their resources of musical action (see the duo in Tristan). But he did so with a fidelity to his own nature which should be taken as an example.

II

I can only explain the contempt into which Rossini has fallen with certain musical minds as being due to an obscuration of the musical sense. In my youth I myself subscribed on trust to this disdain, but in those days I did not know Rossini, and frequented a good deal the Wagnerian sect, now dispersed. In

that circle we took an interest in Schopenhauer because he had been Wagner's master in philosophy, and one of the threadbare opinions we favoured was a scandalised reprobation of certain remarks by Schopenhauer on Rossini. The philosopher of Frankfort in a passage in which he seeks to analyse the profound impressions that music produces on the soul, takes his examples from Rossini. My Wagnerians or Wagner-Schopenhauerites were up in arms about it. As though Rossini's little music appealed to the soul! To day, being better instructed (at least so I fancy), I leave these people, who if the truth were known hardly like Mozart any better, to their puritan gloom, and I firmly believe that it is not Rossini's music which is little, but their souls that might be made of a finer flame.

Rossini's musical education, like that of most Italian musicians of the nineteenth century, Verdi for instance, was sadly neglected. He often said himself that he acquired his first experience by re-arranging the bass of Haydn's quartets. But unlike Verdi, who by dint of study and progress rendered beautiful a style of writing that was originally rude, Rossini was pure from the very beginning. From the purely musical point of view, the *Barber* might be called decadent Mozart; it is Mozart thinned and grown puny, but in no way corrupted or soiled. But is not this inferiority almost made up for by its incomparable wealth of wit and humour? Its melodic language is still thin, and the harmonic language is not yet that of *William Tell*, but they suffice for the distribution of a shower of amazing and delightful inventions. The *Barber* is unique as a display of that very rare gift, facility and a happy touch combined

with genius. The *Barber* is a fine thing, but how far away it seems—one of the last rays of smiling beauty falling on this Europe in which romanticism, Germanism and industrialism were already beginning to make the twilight of art prevail, and were destined to mingle confusion and pain with genius in artists even of the highest gifts.

III

I find in the character of Basile and the air "Calumny" opportunity for a general note on a gift which seems to me to be peculiar to the Italians. They are musically inspired by sentiments and ideas which our composers would, I think, consider incapable of translation into music. We Frenchmen are disposed to believe that music can only express the soul's expansive states—love, enthusiasm, avowed hate, grief, hope, meditation. We believe that song can only well forth from a soul entirely given up to what it feels, and pouring itself forth in song. The idea of depicting by sounds movements of the heart and blood traceable to the absence of generosity, calculated and tortuous sentiments, cold passions that restrain themselves the better to obtain satisfaction, and that seek for means to do so in subtle and dark efforts of the mind —such an idea would seem to us against nature. Or let us say that it is not in keeping with our nature. But there is no doubt it is not excluded by Italian nature; for it is obviously a feature common to the great musicians of Italy in all ages that they have managed to translate into dramatic music of extraordinary truth and beauty the inspirations of cowardice, knavery, treachery, and of vengeance

reserving itself and waiting in secret for its hour to strike.

Everyone remembers that extraordinary little musical epopee of " Calumny." traced from the moment of its imperceptible birth, when it is still only " a breath, a nothing," up to the moment when, having by its slow operation imprisoned its victim in an invisible circle from which there is no escape, it rears its head and in a voice of thunder, and strengthened by popular assent, consigns the unhappy man to infamy and the gibbet. It is a magnificent thing, and if your memory does not represent it to you as such, it will be because you have heard it spoilt by that accursed theatrical purring which often transforms into a vulgar *bravura* air a musical poem rich in fine shades, the execution of which requires not merely a fine singer, but a very good actor.

I go back to the early days of Italian opera, and find in the *Crowning of Poppaea*, by Monteverde, a scene well fitted to illustrate this gift of expression. It is the scene in which Seneca the philosopher being ordered by Nero to disappear from the world, invites his disciples to follow him, in accordance with the Stoic philosophy which teaches that death is a matter of indifference. But the disciples, to talk like one of our troopers, are not having any. And they proclaim the fact with an admirable frankness and freedom of accent. They do not repudiate the Stoic philosophy, but they are not at all desirous of repudiating life, which is also a thing of value. A French poet would never be able to avoid giving these characters a certain consciousness of the somewhat debasing comic quality of their moral attitude; but the sentiment would incidentally have the effect of freezing the music on

their lips. Such a poet would therein be a moralist, but would he be true to nature ? Well, there is nothing comic in loving life, that dear life which we enjoy only once. This chorus of poltroons is a marvellous musical passage.

Let us pass to the other end of the chain. What a creation is that of Iago in Verdi's *Othello !* In this work by a septuagenarian artist, fine as it is as a whole, and possessing so touching a nobility of atmosphere, I confess that the expression of love appears to me weak and faintly portrayed ; but that of warlike heroism is warm and strong. And what shall we say of the outline of the traitor ? Nothing charms my mind like the passage where he tells Othello that he has heard Cassio dreaming of Desdemona. The melody lets fall with a sort of gentle heedlessness the drops of mortal poison, and is interrupted with little pauses, as though to give each drop time to find its way right into the Moor's honest and rugged heart. And it is a delicious melody.

A delicious melody of love or springtime may spring up and grow in any climate. But as to a delicious melody of treachery, that seems to me to belong to a suppleness of musical imagination peculiar to the Italians, and itself traceable to the extraordinary mimetic gifts of that race.

There is another strain in which Italian dramatic music has often excelled, and we must look for it at the opposite end of human sentiments—the note of heroism, more particularly civic heroism. It is is to be found in Rossini's second masterpiece, *William Tell*; —I would not say that it is a masterpiece from beginning to end ; time has tarnished several portions. I willingly throw to the wolves the formulae of

bravura, such as "Matilda, idol of my soul," and passages of artificial and chilly energy ("For our love no hope remains") or of faded grace ("Upon the alien shore"). I will not defend whole-heartedly "Dark Forests," which is however thoroughly musical, with a tinge of old fashioned poetry. But all that is inspired, either in individuals or in the crowd collectively, by patriotism, enthusiasm for liberty, and that love of rustic and pastoral life which among the Swiss mountain folk is identified with those sentiments,—the whole of that (in other words, the greater part of the work) is animated with that spirit of life which confers immortal youth. And of those two inseparable signs of youth, namely, vigour and freshness, it is the latter in particular which is felt in *William Tell*, as was fitting in a poem whose subject is steeped in the atmosphere of Alpine nature.

It is well known that after *William Tell*, Rossini deliberately ceased to write for the theatre. He was only thirty-seven, and during the thirty-nine years that he lived after this he hardly composed anything except his *Stabat*. This retirement is one of the curiosities of the history of art. The reason given by the artist was that he feared his work would deteriorate, and evidently that explanation must be accepted. But if Rossini had died on the morrow of his triumph, the world would have speculated on the magnificence of the career that had been left unfinished. *William Tell* introduced a fresh style and showed, in comparison with the master's previous works, a progress, an enrichment, a deepening in his music which give the impression of a possibility of being carried much further; new modes of expression are attacked, whereby the musician seems at last to have put

himself in a position to grapple with the largest undertakings. And yet he stopped.*

After him the decadence of Italian opera was rapid—to us it seems heart-breaking. Rossini's early musical education had been, as I have said, poor. But from the very beginning his spirit had found itself carried on a stream of free and happy civilisation; from it he had drawn a grace, a natural aristocracy which, if it did not always preserve him from the sin of negligence and improvisation, at any rate saved him absolutely from the vice of vulgarity and slackness. Rossini, in spite of the date of his birth (1797), is like his contemporary Stendhal, a man of the older Europe, of Europe as it was before Rousseau and before romanticism. His sensibility is sane, live and joyous, his intellect clear and decided. He belongs to a time when genius could only be thought of as a participation in the qualities of the gods.

I shall be told that it is certainly an exaggeration or at least inappropriate, to talk of romanticism in connection with Bellini and Donizetti, especially as those musicians, who do not appear to have possessed more general culture than the clarinettist in their orchestra, must have been to a large extent strangers to the movement of ideas in their own day. But they were also sensitive natures and very impressionable, and as such became impregnated with the atmosphere of their time. It is easily perceptible (when one hears, for example, *Lucy of Lammermoor*) that the contagion of the harmful fashions of romantic sensibility contributed largely to that weakness and languor with which, in their hands, Italian opera was afflicted.

* There was something ironical in this. Meyerbeer was in the ascendant. And in Meyerbeer's style Rossini's defeat was a foregone conclusion. But Rossini's own style was better.

They emasculated opera, took away its vigour, weakened and neglected its essential dramatic qualities, set it on the path that leads to dissolution, at the end of which it becomes nothing but a series of "pieces." They emasculated music itself and lost from view the fundamental condition of unity in such works—style. The realisation of style in music presupposes, apart from a general sense of art, the possession of certain technical resources which their training had not conferred on them, and which they disregarded. Style, any sort of style, that is essentially what is lacking in their works. It is not surprising that they produced them with extraordinary rapidity. The evil reputation of Italian opera is of their making.

Are they therefore to be despised? No indeed. They possess a certain genius. They have a genius for melody, melody of the Italian type, long drawn out. They give birth to some melodies that are intolerable, but they hit upon some that are admirable and will never be forgotten. This is especially so with Bellini of whom Wagner has even said: "He who knows him not, knows not what melody is." Yet they often manage to spoil by turgidity, exaggeration and clamour a melodic beginning that was both happy and delicate.

When we think of the *Barber* or of *William Tell*, we recall a work, a subject, characters, types, a musical whole entirely enveloped in a certain colour. When we think of *Norma* or the *Favourite*, what do we recall? Just airs, some of which are beautiful and charming. This simple observation is a judgment.

IV

True greatness prevails in the end. I know no more striking proof of this than the fate of Verdi's work. At one time the intolerance of the Wagnerian sect—it is not among that sect that the intelligent admirers of Wagner's music must be looked for—reigned supreme over music, imposing its pedantic ostracisms, and immolating at the feet of its idol everything that might be worthy, I will not say to supersede, but to counterbalance its cult: but the members of the sect never attacked Verdi. Nothing could be more significant than this reserve. Verdi is extremely vulnerable. Much evil might be spoken of his art not merely from the point of view of Wagnerian doctrine, but from the point of view of the laws of good music in general. True, but when this article of criticism and also of plausible depreciation has been exhausted the result will be to emphasise the superb power and vitality of the genius whose expression victoriously sweeps away the effect of all these blemishes. That is why Verdi has never been attacked. No one has set about to remove him from his pedestal. The fanatics, as I call those who love Wagner more than they love music, may have growled at that great name, but they have never bitten him.

Nothing is nobler or purer in the history of great artists than this master's life. Born in the hamlet of Roncole in 1813 (the same year as Wagner) of humble parents who kept an inn, he grew and throve where he was born. At the age of twelve he was the village organist. Soon a merchant of Busseto, the neighbouring town, named Barezzi, interested himself in him and took him as a clerk, but left him time for music.

Young Verdi had lessons from the Busseto bandmaster, and soon succeeded him. He then composed quantities of pieces of church music and band music. "As a religious and military musician," writes Camille Bellaigue, "he threw to all the winds of the Lombard plain pious hymns and double steps, waltzes, mazurkas and canticles; the church and square of his village resounded with nothing but his notes. His youth 'made a noise'—a tulmultuous, violent noise, often trivial and as it were half wild, but already quivering with passion and life."

The excellent Barrezzi's subsidies enabled him to pay several visits to Milan, where amongst other things he was rejected by the conservatoire, and where he succeeded in giving in 1839 his first opera, *Oberto, Count of San Bonifacio*. From that time his position was established; by that I mean that he could not be overlooked, and that theatres accepted and performed his scores. But he had to compose ten operas and wait ten years before accomplishing his master strokes. Of these he produced three in close succession *Rigoletto* came in 1851, the *Trovatore* in 1853, and the *Traviata* was written during the rehearsals of the *Trovatore*.

These three works have gone round the world and round again and have not grown old. Why? Because they are free from artificiality. They have gaps, rough places, and insipid passages too, and it is astonishing to think of all the resources of musical language that Verdi fails to employ, resources which might have served him, beyond all doubt, in passages that have been left weak, one might almost say meaningless and have been filled up with more noise than expression. He is incapable of rendering, or so it seems to me,

half tones, shades, graduations and transitions of sentiment. And so we find he looks out for a libretto in which the dramatic elaboration is sketchy and more or less hastily thrown together. He is the man for strong situations; they call out of him the accents of a master. And what beguiles us and carries us off our feet, what has made, and continues to make the fascination of this sublime peasant-art is not—and this should be carefully noted—the charm and eloquence of the beautiful melody of the Italian type unfolded with prehensile and vigorous energy. True, that charm and eloquence of melodic line are possessed by Verdi. But Bellini and Donizetti possessed them too; and yet they, if they are not dead, are now only half alive, and it will always be a risky enterprise to try to present *Norma*, *Lucie*, or the *Favourite* in their entirety before the French public of these days, whereas *Rigoletto* and *Traviata* hold the stage with all their old power and fire. The reason is that Verdi's melody has, besides its purely musical charm, the most distinct, strong and original knack of hitting the dramatic truth. It is melodic, but it is also characteristic. It sings, but it also speaks and paints. One might even say that it sings merely as an embellishment. Verdi is more than anything else a musician-dramatist. I quite believe that it is in the course of fixing the outlines of some idea deeply imprinted on his mind (the idea of a passion or a character) that he discovers his happiest musical settings. They have a wonderful lilt; that is the divine privilege of Italy, that is what we admire in *William Tell*. Verdi, I would say again, being a musician of the theatre, has an eye above all to the action. He goes straight to the mark. But whereas it is not given to

Frenchmen in the same degree, and is not given at all to Germans, to follow this straight course and find it blossoming with melody, the Italian genius plucks its flowers thus with ease. I am speaking of the genius of a Verdi, or a Rossini; for with Bellini and Donizetti the melody declares its independence and the drama languishes; the feminine element emancipates itself from the virile.

V

In the fine book of Camille Bellaigue, to whom no work of Verdi is unknown, will be found accurate and valuable information on the long series of operas which he wrote between the decisive moments of his career, the moments that mark the beginning of a fresh stage. I will say a word about the last stage, which corresponds to that triple harvest of glory, *Aïda*, *Othello*, *Falstaff*.

It has often been said that Verdi changed his manner under the influence of Wagner. Nothing could be more untrue. Verdi remained entirely himself. If he had deviated however little from the line of his own nature, he would have grown weak. And that certainly is not what happened. We ought to say that Verdi's own special genius, received from the impulsion of Wagner a fresh impetus on its own lines. It is right to give credit to Wagner for this, but it is not possible to say that in any of these three works there is the smallest Wagnerian touch or inflexion. "The hour was grave, even threatening," writes Camille Bellaigue, speaking of this renovation. "*Lohengrin* was about to cross the Alps and descend as a conqueror. Verdi armed himself for the defence

of the genius of his race. But whatever may have been asserted then or since, he armed himself with no weapons but his own. He borrowed nothing from, and yielded nothing to his terrible adversary. Someone has put it whimsically : ' It was on his own shoulders that Verdi always climbed to raise himself higher and higher.' "

In this reform he did not allow his personal sense of expression to be in any way impaired. He simply perfected and purified his instrument of expression. I feel sure that he renewed his musical studies, and we have a curious corroboration of this in a string quartet written in 1873 ; it is not a masterpiece, but still less is it deserving of contempt ; it is very well written according to the rules governing this difficult form. It was not the bandmaster of Busseto who had taught him that. The result in Verdi's work was a nobility of style which reaches grandeur in *Aïda*, an art of half tones which triumphs in *Othello* and *Falstaff*. It seems to me (but I may be mistaken) that in *Othello* the portrayal of the violent passions of love and hate smacks somewhat of old age. On the other hand, the cold passion of a traitor and consummate master of intrigue is there rendered with a mastery only to be compared with that which created Basile in the *Barber* ; it is one of the things in music that will never die.

VI

I have called the art of Verdi, the earlier Verdi especially, a peasant art. He was himself a peasant, but one of nature's noblemen. Thanks to this characistic his intellectual development was magnificently extended while retaining a perfect simplicity

I do not suppose that he learnt much at his village school, and his literary culture must have remained very incomplete and haphazard. But he had that mark of the higher breeds, common-sense and reasoning power. And so what he managed to read and acquire without much method taught him to have a clear outlook on humanity and life. The books which he set to music, except those made for him by the master hand of Boïto, were poor literature. I am struck with the perseverance with which he meditated them, steeped himself in them. He would con them a hundred times. These often wretched lucubrations dealt after all with human matters. Their subjects were the follies and tragedies of love and ambition, the greatness and distress of kings, the destiny of nations. It was just universal history, and a piercing eye could trace its outlines under a clumsy and puerile portrayal. That is why Verdi read his books so many times. He was transforming them. He was transporting these melodramatic trifles on to the plane of seriousness, truth and greatness. And that is why one so often has the impression that his music is saying something great, though the words are poor.

A fine trilogy might be made of these three great Latins, Verdi, Mistral and J. H. Fabre. Three great peasants, each a genius, they grew like oaks in the middle of their village square, and they grew so high that the universe has greeted their burgeoning.

CHAPTER IV

MEYERBEER

In the discussions provoked, or rather renewed, by the war, on the subject of French and German music, the names and works of many famous musicians have come up for judgment, but not much has been said about Meyerbeer. Wagner's apologists have given him a few hard knocks, but have not pressed the attack. Doubtless they do not see much danger for the future of their cult in the author of the *Huguenots*. M. Saint-Saëns has made a brief reply, and in particular has asked whether they regarded the fourth act of the *Huguenots* as a small thing. The point was quite inadequate as a general defence of Meyerbeer's work, but it was not ill-chosen. The fourth act of the *Huguenots* is Meyerbeer's most successful effort; he has perhaps written other pages as strong, but he has never written an equally long sequence of strong pages. I say strong, not fine, pages; there is a distinction. M. Saint-Saëns has by no means proved by this reference as much as he would have wished to prove; he will not have changed in the least the opinion of those who, knowing Meyerbeer's musical work by hearing and reading it, judge it as a whole with severity. But he has done well in indicating a certain limit, a certain restraint which should be observed in this severity if one wishes that it should remain strictly fair and rightly proportioned to the interests of taste.

I will justify to the best of my ability the estimate which I propose to offer of the value of Meyerbeer's

work and of his share in the destinies of musical art. Even those who judge it with greater disfavour than myself cannot but recognise that it is worth while to examine closely the constitution of works which between 1830 and 1870 reigned with brilliance not only in Paris, but in all the musical theatres of Europe ; some of them are still performed, and have, as it is expressed, kept a public, even after having lost all influence on artists and schools.

I

Jacob Liebmann Beer was born at Berlin on the 23rd September, 1791 and was the son of a rich Jewish banker. The paternal fortune was destined to play no unimportant part in his artistic career. It was not merely that it freed him in his youth from the preoccupation of earning his bread and permitted him thereafter to consecrate his whole time to musical production, which in his case seems to have been a painful and laborious process (in passing I may remark that time has nothing to do with the matter). But more than this, he knew how to employ his money with superior cunning to organise, as it is called now-a-days, the launching of his works, to pave the way for their success and make it last. He did not pay theatrical managers to perform them, because in his day that was not done. But he used to give expensive dinners to journalists before the first nights ; he was ready, though clever, with his gold. He had the means for self-advertisement, and made the most of them. Let us add, though the fact is obvious, that all this would have availed him nothing if his art had not contained in itself the material of sucess at the moment

when his works were brought out. But we shall perhaps find that his art itself had some of the characteristics of a successful flotation, and that if Meyerbeer's genius and Meyerbeer's money were certainly two quite different things, yet they were not two things between which there was exactly the solution of continuity that we should normally expect.

Having shown very early a turn for music he was entrusted to the care of the Abbé Vogler, precentor at Darmstadt, at whose school he had for fellow-pupil the future author of *Freischütz* and of *Oberon*, Carl Maria Weber. In the excellent notice of Meyerbeer written by MM. Victor Debay and Paul Locard for Lavignac's Musical Encyclopaedia, I see the " principles of musical discipline " taught by the Abbé Vogler are characterised as " severe." These gentlemen are no doubt better informed than I on the teaching of the Abbé Vogler. But there is one branch of classical musical discipline which Meyerbeer soon forgot completely, assuming he ever had any solid grounding in it. He shewed himself utterly impotent in the symphonic side of the art. In principle I certainly would not make that a reproach against him ; he was a musician of the theatre, and the example of more than one great genius, Glück and Grétry for instance, proves that masterpieces of dramatic music can be written by men who have not made themselves masters of this side of their art. That is a fact. But it is only one fact, and it would be wrong to conclude that a studious apprenticeship in symphonic technique is valueless for all musicians, or that they can dispense with it without running a dangerous risk ; or even that those great men would have gained nothing from it in resources of expression and composition in which

they were lacking, and in the possibility of bold experiments on which they did not venture. Yet we bow before the results, charming or sublime, which the gifts of sensibility and inventiveness possessed by these great poets with a genius for the theatre were able to attain merely by the observance of more elementary and simpler laws than those which govern symphonic composition. The great thing is only to do what one can do; accordingly we do not find Glück and Grétry attempting what is beyond their powers, but not beyond the powers of Rameau, Mozart and Beethoven, trained athletes who could give play to every kind of suppleness, strength or fancy, wizards initiated in all the glorious devices and all the magic of the feast of sound. Meyerbeer did not copy this reserve. His unlucky symphonic efforts draw painful attention to this gap in his talent. His overtures offer the most convincing example. Look at that of the *Huguenots*, which aims at being a development of Luther's fine chant. No sooner has the theme been set out with the accompaniment of an apt and strong harmony than there begins the most pitiful, irrational and breathless working up. It is the same with the overture of *Robert the Devil* on the famous theme of the infernal evocation, and with the Coronation March in the *Prophet*. Well, I shall be told, Meyerbeer can afford to have condemnation passed on him on that point, according to the rule you have laid down yourself, if he has given all the necessary proofs of mastery and power in the form of dramatic composition. The question is not so simple where Meyerbeer is concerned. The majority of the French public of his time, who only knew music by the contemporary musicians of the theatre, lived in the

conviction that Meyerbeer had brought them "great music." Auber was little music, pleasant and "very French." But Meyerbeer was high art, with its depths and mysteries. Now it was especially by these big chunks of false symphony (the solemn presentation of which did not alter the fact that they were failures), that he had created this illusion. The remainder of my criticism will show the drift of that remark.

It is only fair to add that Meyerbeer's musical culture considered in its other aspects was rich and substantial. His harmony is often massive, and for that reason too Germanic for my taste; but it is strong, and close and firm. He excels in musical construction within the peculiar limits of operatic airs and stage settings. He handles his ideas firmly. He has vivacity, pageantry, and sometimes elegance. He has a variety of form which lends itself to criticism on the ground that the forms are obviously borrowed from all sorts of musicians, but which yet has its value. He is a master of instrumentation.

Let us dwell upon this last merit, though even that cannot be praised without reserve. The illustrious Gevaërt is no doubt justified in saying that "the most passionate detractors of Meyerbeer cannot deny that he has an exquisite tact in the choice of sounds."* But in the eyes of sound scholarship this talent has no true worth except by the quality of the inspiration in the service of which it is employed, and of the ideas which it illustrates. The tones of the different instruments are a wonderful means of expression, but of all the means of expression at music's disposal they are the most material, and therefore they are really only valuable through the nobility

* *Traité d' instrumentation* p. 261.

of the matter which they help to express and make felt. They might be compared to a colour scheme of which the least important appeals have an inestimable charm when the picture that it expresses recommends itself by the poetry of its thought, the beauty and energy of the composition, the strength of the movement. Are these higher virtues absent? Then a connoisseur will certainly not let himself be captured by the brilliant palette-work which a clever artist offers us by way of compensation. There you have the point that it is important to note about Meyerbeer's instrumentation. The passages in which the fascination that he knows so well how to put into his work is in true proportion to the poetry of the idea are absolutely exceptional. One of the passages that does give me the impression of this due proportion is the celebrated bit in the *Africaine*, "Wonderful Land." There the feeling of gracious and calm enthusiasm which is exhaled from the melody and harmony calls for the fascination of a cleverly smooth orchestration. But take "Whiter than the ermine white," or again, "O fair land of Touraine." Here the special charm of the orchestral tones is nothing but the adornment of a hollow emptiness.

The brilliance of this exploitation of instrumental resources was something new for French ears, it was largely this that attracted them—one might say, as regards a good deal of it, took them in. By this feature of his art Meyerbeer was destined to exercise a most unfortunate influence on the future of music in our country. He required of combinations of sound—mere sound effects—that they should make up for the inadequacy, the mediocre and often low quality of the actual musical thought; how then could he be content with the orchestra of such as Rameau, Mozart, Beethoven or

Boïeldieu? To create for himself the necessary resources, he had to provision himself, if I may put it that way, with an exaggerated quantity of sound-material, and to enlarge greatly the orchestral mass. The heaviness, the excessive weight, what has been called the obesity of the modern dramatic orchestra, which has become in our time the nightmare of all refined lovers of music, dates from Meyerbeer. The Germans put up with it gladly, nay revel in it. But for French musicians it is a condition incompatible with the free development and liberty of their nature; and French musical art, which has unfortunately allowed it to prevail far too much, could only continue to tolerate it at the price of its own extinction and death.

I have no intention, nor indeed have I the opportunity, of following the first part of Meyerbeer's career when he was producing work without having yet found I will not say his personality, but his form, the form of the works which have filled the world with his name. As to his personality, I do not consider he ever found it; at most he found it only in rare and disjointed fragments whose authenticity is never very sure. The series begins with *Robert the Devil*, which was triumphantly successful at Paris in November 1831.

But it is very interesting, or rather it is necessary, to indicate briefly the incarnations, multiple and complete avatars, through which he had gone before reaching this point; he was in succession a German composer, an Italian composer and a French composer.

He began in Germany with an oratorio and two operas, produced at Darmstadt, Vienna and Stuttgart. According to the testimony that I have been able to gather about these works of his youth, they seem

to have shown strength, but to have been conceived in that form of stiff and cold scholasticism that has generally been achieved by those who have sought to copy the majesty of Handel (the Saxon master whose work was so nobly influenced and modified by the environment of aristocratic England), without being able to copy his genius or his grandeur of sentiment. They had no success. Now Nature had created in Jacob Liebmann Beer (he had added Meyer to his name in obedience to the wish if a rich relation whose heir he had become) a man hardly capable of imagining any polestar but success for artists at the crossroads of life, success being, beyond dispute, the polestar of merchants anxious to find a market for their wares. Who was successful in Europe just then? Rossini. Meyerbeer is off to Italy, steeps himself in the methods of Rossini, and brings out at Padua, Turin and Venice three operas in Rossini's first manner. He translates his first name Jacob into Italian, and becomes Giacomo Meyerbeer. A symbolic combination, as M. Lionel Dauriac has wittily remarked; for in the operas of his settled manner, it was constantly to happen that an air begun in the German style should go on in the Italian, that Handel should give way to Rossini or Donizetti, that Meyer should provide the air and Giacomo the refrain.

However, the affectionate remonstrances of Weber, added no doubt to the signs of wear which Rossini's manner (the Rossini of *Tancred* and *Semiramis*) was beginning to show, and the great expansion in style of Rossini himself, led Meyerbeer to conclude that he had gone too far in the direction of Italy. He resumed relations with Berlin and composed an opera of mixed, or rather double, style, *Il Crociato in Egitto*, which

we know; the biographers whom I have quoted say truly that in it he thought to attain originality by drawing inspiration simultaneously from Rossini and Weber. *Il Crociato* was presented at the Théâtre-Italien in 1825. This circumstance was decisive. Contact with Paris and the first-hand discovery of French music and its virtues revealed to the musician the path of his future triumphs. He was approaching forty, but no change alarmed him, and he resolved to become a French composer. From that time it was on books written in French, or at any rate in a sort of French, that he composed all his operas, The first fruit of this resolve was *Robert the Devil* presented at the Opera on the 22nd November, 1831, poem by Scribe. Its success was sensational, and when at a later date *Robert* was performed at Berlin, we shall find Frederick-William IV endorsing the applause of Paris by appointing Meyerbeer director-general of music at the Prussian court.

II

Robert the Devil is an important date in the history of music. In this work Meyerbeer had created a new branch of art, a branch that was destined to make his fortune and derive its fortune from him—Grand Opera. But is " branch " the right word? No, it was rather a combination. The legitimate branches of literature and art have their foundation in nature. Tragedy, comedy, the epopee, the novel, satire, the madrigal, epigram—or again, lyric drama, comic opera, oratorio, the cantata, song—these correspond to so many aspects under which things can be regarded, painted, or sung, or to so many natural modes of feeling,

natural aspirations of the human soul. Grand opera has its foundation not in nature, but in Meyerbeer's nature. It was born with Meyerbeer and died with him. Its decease is not universally admitted, and many people still imagine that what corresponds in music to the natural and eternal distinction of comedy and tragedy, whatever names one may give them, is the distinction between comic opera and grand opera. But that is an error. Grand opera is in no way musical tragedy; I allow that it more resembles tragedy than comedy, though it commonly contains a large comic element—an involuntary element, it is true. More than anything else it resembles itself. Let us try to define it.

Among its characteristics the most striking is not the least disastrous, namely the literary baseness of the libretto. Providence had not created Meyerbeer for Scribe, since the latter's work would still be considerable apart from his collaboration with the author of *The Huguenots*. But Providence had created Scribe for Meyerbeer. The association of these two introduced into the musical theatre the toleration of those books which are absolute artistic outrages both in matter and in form. The idea, still very widespread, that the book of an opera is not really adapted to its function and does not conform to its destiny unless it contains absurdities, is only a statement of the way they are made, set up as a rule for their manufacture.

In old days it was an almost universal custom of operatic composers to borrow their subjects from the masterpieces of ancient and modern literature. It was an immense gain to music to take as its material fables and figures already handled, interpreted and illustrated by the great poets. Musical drama, (I

use the expression in its most general application) is after all nothing but the modern form of the ancient and natural union between music and poetry ; without that union complete enjoyment seems impossible—the absence of it leaves something wanting. By uniting herself in this form and setting to poetry of proved nobility, grandeur or delicacy, music bound herself in turn to seek these virtues and to display them in opera, as she had displayed them before the days of opera in the choruses of Greek tragedy, in the fine hymns of the church, which were a continuation of ancient music, and in that wonderful choral music of the sixteenth century which was written to the verses of Ronsard and the masters of the " Pleiad." The very titles of the operas of Monteverde, Lulli, Rameau, Glück, Mozart, Méhul—of all the great masters (not to mention the lesser, and without quoting those who, after Meyerbeer, reverted to this custom, or the heroic Berlioz who was faithful to it all his life), bear absolutely unanimous witness to the truth of my remark. I am not in the least attempting to lay this down as a *sine qua non* of good opera ; but all the same the age-long persistence of a certain artistic practice and the great number of masterpieces in which we come across it, do oblige us to accept it as a convention almost equivalent to a necessity. The reasons why this convention showed itself eminently favourable to beauty of expression are obvious. In view of the very dominant part that music plays in opera, it is hardly to be expected that many librettists will be found who combine disinterested enthusiasm with the power to create anything equivalent to the accepted masterpieces of literature. If this combination should be found, so much the better ; but all

one can expect, or rather all one ought to exact, from the poet of opera is that he should contribute in his adaptations good sense, a delicate and sure taste, a certain grace and a good style.

I would add that the services rendered to music by literary masterpieces may also be rendered by subjects which though, they have not found their Sophocles, their Vergil, their Tasso or their Racine, have yet undergone some treatment by the human imagination that is familiar to all ; for instance legendary traditions or popular tales. The essential thing is that Music should find a certain poetic elaboration completed and ready to her hand. Perhaps I shall here be confronted with examples such as Verdi (Verdi in his earlier days) who more often that not worked on the coarsest and most raw dramatic material. His case is exceptional, but it bears out the idea ; for in this early manner Verdi (whom I passionately admire) while showing sufficient strength to raise a poor subject above its own level in places, is yet lacking in general harmony and order, and his spurts of genius do not constitute a style. Then again, the dramatic poems on which he works are very simple and elementary in their shrivelled roughness, a fact which allows him great freedom to interpret and almost to create the subject himself.

Meyerbeer's " books " on the other hand are complicated and turgid, and the action gets involved in a great deal of ostentation.

Let us however make no mistake about the quality of the ambition shown by Meyerbeer's choice of these books. It is a large but modest ambition. The course steered by him from *Robert the Devil* on proves that he had arrived at a true knowledge of himself.

He had in his youth written a *Daughter of Jephtha*, a mediocre work indeed ; but he now realised that these high poetic sources, these purified and ennobled materials were not for him. He had, I say, this modesty as regards himself. He shewed it also (and, alas, not without some reason) on behalf of the kind of public that the political revolutions of France, the prevalent social confusion and romantic jumble of ideas, had prepared for a musician of the year 1831. What he expected of Scribe, or what Scribe offered him was heavy historic melodrama conceived in a spirit of trivial romanticism, and overloaded with contrivances and special scenic or decorative machinery, This last element of the combination was not after all the worst, being the most capable of inspiring in Meyerbeer a relatively sincere music.

I do not deny that there are in Scribe's " books " some elements less worthless than others—I indicate his average quality.*

III

Nothing could be more instructive than the metamorphoses of *Robert the Devil*. It was conceived first as comic opera, then as a fantastic ballet, and lastly as grand opera. The two former destinations would have been more suitable for one of those naughtily

* The *Jewess* of Halévy, which belongs to 1835, and is therefore a year earlier than the *Huguenots*, also gives us heavy pseudo-historic melodrama without humanity or poetry. That too is by Eugène Scribe, and might well have been by Eugène Sue. But its music is far more sincere than Meyerbeer's. Without liking its style one can acknowledge its feeling and power and here and there its touching and graceful quality, Speaking generally Halévy's work seems to me to have become the object of more contempt than it deserves. There are some really fine portions in the *Musketeers Guido*, and the *Queen of Cyprus*.

horrifying stories of the middle ages, in which a lady is mishandled by the devil. In the theatre, there are difficulties about taking the devil tragically; he can hardly appear except either as a particularly outrageous practical joker or as a master of fireworks. Meyerbeer's Bertram has kept some features of this primitive character, and displays them in the celebrated humorous duet of Raimbaud, "The worthy man," which is an excellent piece, far the best in the whole score. But to turn the theme into grand opera, it was necessary to invent a tragic and moving devil, and give him a psychology, a double psychology as devil and father, which any pen but Scribe's would have been afraid to portray. It was necessary moreover to link up the motives of the ballet with the bases of the tragedy, in which however the ballet continued to stick out in all directions. We know the result. This devil displays to his son at once the tender protection of a father and the wickedness of a tempter; he passionately desires the happiness of his son and from sheer love strives desperately to damn his soul, so as not to be separated from him but enjoy (no doubt) in hell the sweets of paternity; one fine day, or rather one foul night, he learns, having gone to Satan's caverns for information, that he has only till the morrow at midnight to achieve the perdition of this soul (Satan regards the whole business with a strange aloofness), because that is the hour when "his leave expires." Does not this style of invention show the most delightfully reckless ineptitude? These words would in fact be rather stronger than the subject is worth if there had not been whole generations who imagined (and there still are people who do so) that Meyerbeer had achieved in

Bertram a masterly creation. Bertram's creation stops short at a red beard and a flame-coloured doublet.

All the moral (so-called) springs of the action, the character of Robert, and all the characters are of the same calibre. And now having spoken of the book, we shall be expected no doubt to talk of the music. But is it not at once obvious that this music can only develop its merits up to a certain level, and that all the virtues to be found in it cannot exclude or make up for a certain essential blemish, a birthmark, traceable to the incongruity of the occasion that provides the reason for its existence? I admit that the famous air of the diabolic summons, " Nuns at rest," is musically welcome, and has a satisfying tragic way about it. But this tragic element—this tragic puppetry, cannot be taken seriously, and merely conveys a touch of the grotesque. I find a very subtle appreciation of it among the night wanderers of Toulouse, when they make the streets of their worthy town (where Meyerbeer is thought a deal of) resound with Bertram's appeal.

It is the same sense of fitness which makes Alphonse Daudet select " Robert, thou whom I adore " as the great dramatic air to be sung at the Bezuquets at Tarascon. Verdi is full of airs that linger in everyone's memory, and that have a popular, often even a vulgar, turn. And yet Daudet would never have given us Verdi at the Bezuquets, and the airs of *Traviata* are not the ones with which the echoes of the Toulouse streets resound at the break-up of festive dinner parties. There is in them a dignity that protects them, and it is this dignity (of which every connoisseur feels the secret absence in Meyerbeer's ideas) which perhaps does most to give the idea of greatness. We still

read now and again that Meyerbeer's music is " very French." What is assuredly more French is this pleasant irony at the expense of operatic rhetoric.

IV

The *Huguenots*, presented in 1836 with a Parisian success equal to that of *Robert*, and a European success still more pronounced, is not a masterpiece. But it is Meyerbeer's masterpiece. Side by side with a certain quantity of rubbish there certainly occur powerful pages marked by superior mastery. But none of them have that natural charm and simplicity which characterise what is really fine and really good not only in delicate work, but equally in the serious and grand styles. Still, unless one is hopelessly prejudiced, one cannot withhold admiration from some scenes and one act which show an energy that is abundant though impure in form and colouring, a pompous but sustained eloquence, strong handling and firm balance. These qualities always secure an undeniable hold, if not on the heart, which is not touched, at any rate on the senses and on the understanding.

We must not be surprised that the *Huguenots* is the " book " that best inspired Meyerbeer. The musician used to indicate a subject to his librettist, and the latter made a scenario of it. Now I am convinced that of all the " books " on which he worked this one attracted him by less cold, artificial and material motives than the others. It flattered in Meyerbeer a latent hereditary religious hostility. A regrettable passion ; granted, but we are talking art. And this passion was, like all passions, capable of mingling a certain ardour with its expression. Do

you not perceive it in that special strength of coarse musical eloquence which saves from disaster the famous scene of the benediction of the daggers? One cannot say whether it is historically, morally or dramatically that this device is most absurd.

In this scene the musician has introduced nuns also praying over daggers, not, be it said, as a refinement of artistic outrage, but in order that the chorus should not lack soprano voices. And I admit I greatly enjoy a complete harmony of voices. But I esteem musical art too highly to endure that its beauty should be achieved at the price of incongruities committed in another sphere, beauty being, according to the immortal saying of Eugène Delacroix, "the union of all seemliness."

Combined with the dexterity of Scribe this personal feeling on the composer's part produced a book which (if we tolerate the form at all) is relatively happy. This art form is so mechanical that it is bound to exclude the real study of characters and sentiments, and when it attempts these it soon makes itself ridiculous. One cannot deny to the old Huguenot soldier Marcel some rudimentary moral personality. But doesn't this manner of displaying the religious depths of his soul (it consists of shouting, on any provocation or none, Luther's hymn) smack of the puppet show? With this reserve it must admitted be that in the *Huguenots* the spectacular part—the set pieces of the court and its pleasures, the feasts, scenes of crowds and processions—is cleverly connected with the action. One is grateful to the authors for having given it great importance, this accessory being the main part of grand opera of the Meyerbeer school. And for that reason I quite believe that the *Huguenots* will

remain not the masterpiece (that is not the right word), but the very brilliant monument of grand opera—I should say of " big " opera.

V

Thirteen years elapsed between the *Huguenots* and the *Prophet.* In spite of this laudably prolonged elaboration, this work did not surpass its predecessor as the latter had surpassed *Robert.* For my part I place it lower. Parts of the *Prophet* are brilliant, but the work as a whole leaves the impression of vast emptiness. This is easily explained by the radically uncertain and vacillating character of the plot. The principal character, the prophet, has no real existence. Jean, the young innkeeper of Leyde, lets himself be pushed into the position of religious head of the anabaptists who are stirring up the peasants against their masters. But is he actuated merely by the thought of personal vengeance against the Lord Oberthal who has robbed him of his sweetheart ? Or is he on the other hand an inspired fanatic who puts his mystic mission before everything, and has no thought left of sweetheart or mother ? He embodies these two contradictory ideas, these two versions, both in turn affirmed and predominating ; the story of the vision in the second act only offers a very miserable and vamped up effort at reconciling the two. This moral quality of the hero, this ambiguity of nature in the action, make the *Prophet,* regarded as drama, a sort of void for the intellect, and prevent the heart from being touched by those great religious scenes, which seem mere veneer. The character of Fides, the mother, is the only one which has a certain moral reality. Whatever be the motive for which her son has put himself at the head of robbers and assassins, the grief of this old

peasant woman will be the same and will be expressed in the same fashion. There is also merit, and sometimes a great deal of merit, in the sketch of the three anabaptists.

These rapid analyses illustrate sufficiently on the dramatic side the form which Meyerbeer, aided by Scribe, invented for his own use. It is easy to see how empty, artificial and faked it is, and also how audaciously clever in the calculation of effect. I will not dwell upon the *Africaine*, in which we see a couple of African savages who could give points to the most skilful Portuguese navigator in the reading of marine charts, and who think and express themselves with refinements of delicacy worthy of old-fashioned diplomatists. Nor will I linger over the comic operas —the tiresome *Northern Star*, in which all the recipes for French lightness are applied with painful heaviness —or the *Ploërmel Pardon*, which is perhaps better, but contributes nothing to the glory of Meyerbeer, who certainly did not shine in comic opera.

I think too I should be wearisome if I spent long in emphasising the wretchedness of the writing. It is notorious, and it is an easy game to pick out the faults in French and the fine blossoms of absurdity.* But

* Translator's note: The quotation with which M. Lasserre illustrates this remark may be of interest to some readers in the original French:

Ses jours sont ménacés,
Ah! je dois l'*y* soustraire.
Déjà le Portugais, hardi navigateur,
D'une route nouvelle entrevoyant *la chance.*
Où grondait la tempête a placé l'espérance.
Amoureux vulgaires,
Vos Feux ordinaires
Ne s'allument guère,
Que pour quelques jours.
Pâtissier modèle,
Ma flamme éternelle
Et se renouvelle
Et brûle toujours.

what is the use of quoting these gems? Even when the style of speech of the Meyerbeer-Scribe characters is less incorrect or less extravagant, it is still separated from what is natural by a mysterious gulf. A feature that is not noticed so much is the outrages on prosody with which the musical text teems. In the quick movements especially, the musician, whose mother-tongue was German, completely loses the small sense he may ever have acquired of the values of syllables in French.

For your instruction, look at the Polonaise in the first act of the *Northern Star*. As regards prosody it is appalling, it is really unsingable. Only a Boche could keep smiling when rendering *soldat* with the *sol* long and the *dat* short; or *qui marche droit* with the *che* long and *droit* short—or when giving *s'élance* with the same length for *s'é* and *lan*. An example familiar to everyone is that of Robert's Ballade at the words: *Et Berthe jusqu-alors si fière.*" I don't know how singers get over it, but it's much more difficult than *fruit cuit, fruit cru*. And I repeat, these horrors abound. They are absolutely intolerable, and to my way of thinking, a page of music in which they occur has no right to see the light of day.

VI

It remains for me to consider the musician separately. Not that the judgment to be delivered on a work of dramatic music taken alone and the judgment concerning the quality of the dramatic work itself can be made independent of each other. What is attempted is merely to observe separately the elements of the whole work, poetry and music, in order to form a

just impression of the combined effect and assign the work its right place.

Here is one striking point. It is, if not true, at any rate plausible and specious to say that Meyerbeer is a great musician. And yet his name does not suggest to the imagination the points of a really distinct musical personality. When we speak of Rameau or Glück or Mozart, or again (I purposely add to these great names some lesser ones) of Berlioz, Bizet, Gounod, Massenet, we have present in our mind the vision, either sublime or at least attractive, of a certain original creation with which they have enriched the world of art, of some form of expression which they have contributed, something coming from them which did not exist before them, which would not have existed without them. In the same way we cannot read four lines of Racine or of La Fontaine, or even of Voltaire, without being conscious that, mysteriously blended with the classic generality of the form, there exists a touch, an imprint that belongs only to these poets. It is the imprint, the aroma of individuality; and from that comes the affection, which combines in us with admiration, for artists of real genius and real grace—a softer and perhaps a truer emotion than mere admiration.

There is nothing of this sort about Meyerbeer. Show me if you can the passage where you find his special touch, the unique sound of his voice, his original accent, the inimitable inflexions of his sensibility. With him they do not exist, Among the pleasures which some minds find in him affection cannot be reckoned one.

What is consistently lacking in Meyerbeer's music is the freshness of nature and sincerity. I have already said so incidentally, and I now make it the dominant

point of my criticism. Attribute to him all the other virtues, and I will reason with you. But if you do not feel the radical absence of that quality, without which one may say tersely that nothing is any good, without which nothing can be achieved but a more or less successful " stunt," then discussion is useless. There is nothing surprising in this peculiarity of Meyerbeer's music, for it is not his own, it is other people's. Whose ? Everybody's, provided they were great or successful. It is the music of everybody whom Germany, Italy and France had been applauding for half a century or a century. It is Handel's, Rossini's, Mozart's, Boïeldieu's, Beethoven's, Herold's—not forgetting Glück, Spontini, and Spohr. It is the music of *reflection.*

Legitimate imitation, as practised by all great artists, consists of steeping oneself in the works of the masters, not in order to reproduce their style and manner, but in order to provide one's personal inspiration with means of expression. This inspiration when it exists infuses a new life into the substance of what is borrowed and transfigures it. To have mastered certain delicate secrets of French rhythm in Anatole France or Lemaître, is a totally different thing from writing diluted Anatole France or Lemaître Meyerbeer writes diluted Handel, Rossini, etc. Even then it would not be so bad if he had only taken one model, or only one to each opera. But he passes from one to another and back again in the course of a single work, a single act, a single scene, a single page. And this patchwork of styles gives the most tangible evidence for the proof of his eternal alibi.

Imagine a Delille possessed of talent and rhetorical cleverness, but having no poetic accent of his own, and

dominated by all the styles of poetry which have successively prevailed in France from the *Pléiade* to Victor Hugo and Ronsard. He writes scenes of plays, tirades beginning in the manner of Racine, or at any rate of Crebillon, and continuing in the manner of Hugo, or it may be of Auguste Vacquerie. That would have been impossible in literature, even at periods of relative corruption in our taste. But the like *has* been seen in music. To the coarsening of taste have been added, by way of cloaking the scandal, all the camouflage of which opera admits the use. But if, in France at any rate, this scandal has never been unmasked and defined by criticism, there has been an obscure consciousness of it ever since a more sincere expression has reappeared on the boards, and it has been the death of Meyerbeer. "Something for all tastes," might be the motto of his work. It exploited pell-mell all the forms which had been successful in all the countries of Europe, and dragged them in side by side in musical utterance with no other rule of choice than the inflexible purpose of forcing success. It is a known fact that for certain important passages Meyerbeer wrote several airs. He used to try them at the public rehearsal and plump for the one which produced most effect.

Imitation conceived in this manner allows the most precious part of what it imitates to be lost. It is useless for Meyerbeer to take as model the masters of impassioned eloquence or brilliant lightness; he himself is more often than not cold and heavy. The forms that he steals are no longer animated in his hands by the vibration of the life-impulse which created them. There is a certain quality, the most enviable of all that music can possess, more easily

felt than defined, for which musicians have only one word, oddly chosen it may be thought, but there is no substitute for it. "A thing is, or is not, *musical*," they say, and it often happens that they deny the epithet to music that is very well constructed. Meyerbeer's music is often well constructed. But it rarely deserves to be called musical. One is distinctly conscious that this expression describes a kind of divine lightness of the elements.

I would not be taken to mean that movement is wanting in Meyerbeer's works. But the movement that may be discovered in them is not really (as it should be) that of the music itself, or very rarely so. It is the movement of the great melodramatic and scenic machine to whose engines the music is harnessed; they give it an artificial and seeming animation without fully succeeding in relieving its heaviness. What is original about Meyerbeer is that he applied to the use of grand opera all the music that had been made in Europe from Bach to Auber, sacred and profane music, vocal and instrumental music. In this sense, an ill-informed public was not wrong in finding "great music" in his work. But it was presented to them (side by side with a great deal of little and even bad music) in a kind of refraction, on the very artificial plane and in the terribly gilded setting of grand opera. Meyerbeer himself took cognisance of the world of poetry and the world of sounds with a sort of enthusiasm, from the angle of grand opera. Grand opera, that was what he loved, with the love of a barbarian, a manufacturer and a real artist, simultaneously. This love inspired him now and again with a kind of theatrical poetry, of which the expression crops up especially in certain passages of the *Africaine*. I like

to imagine as coming from his own lips the really fine phrase of Vasco, " Wonderful land " ; the horizons he is contemplating are the boards, furnished with astonishing landscapes of gilded cardboard, sumptuous processions, dazzling costumes and other magnificent effects ; the boards where fright and terror come suddenly to interrupt the joyous feast, where the intoxicated guests see a spectre rise, where the soul of dark conspiracies is revealed merely at the bidding of a minor seventh chord crashed out by the orchestra at the right moment.

To test the correctness of my judgnemt (it is one that brings me into agreement with a great many musicians) you have only to look through Meyerbeer's scores in the best passages, that is in the scenes that are reputed to be the most happily contrived, and find out whether or no a perpetual solution of continuity in the style may be observed in them ; whether or no the three or four developments which follow one another in them are written in three or four different languages ; a sort of arbitrary selection or instantaneous decision seems to have presided over their choice, as though at each phase of his composition the musician had relapsed into a state of absolute mental confusion, and an uncertainty of musical control, from which he has only been able to extricate himself by making an entirely fresh start. Drawing at random on my memory, I will offer a few examples.

VII

In the *Africaine,* Act I., Scene I, compare these three passages : " I hope . . My hand shall be . . .The farewell song . . "—taken from a space of

thirty bars and sung by the same person. The first is a phrase from *Euryanthe*, spoilt; the second a good formula from Glück; the third from Weber. The opening bars of the romance which follows are, by the way, very pretty up to where the runs begin.

Take, in the same opera, Nelusko's air, "Daughter of Kings." The first phrase has certainly a majestic gait; but the one which follows, "When Love possesses me," without being bad is taken off quite a different shelf of the musical library. This head and body do not fit each other.

In the *Prophet*, at the beginning of Act IV., follow what is sung by Fides from the cavatina, "Oh thou who forsakest me," and on to the following scene. Take first the cavatina; a phrase apparently noble and pure, resembling Beethoven, and composed of the notes of the perfect chord; one cannot deny that it is a fine phrase, but on the other hand it has the misfortune to be instrumental, not vocal; to be exact, it is a clarinet phrase. The mother weeps over the son who has forsaken her, and promises to forgive him. Thereupon appears an officer who urges the aged woman to prostrate herself before the "King-Prophet" who is about to appear. Then the pious woman's thought turns to God, and she implores the divine light to bring back her lost one. This certainly ought to be said in a different tone, but in a tone suited to the character and coming from the soul. Well, what do we find? A horrible piece of *bravura*, a coarse imitation of Weber in his passionate manner, ascending and descending cascades of notes and syllables, whose material precipitation does not in the least produce, as the composer intends, the expression of moral exaltation. However, as this achievement does not

satisfy him, and he is determined for the finish further to augment his effect, what resource is left him? Sheer brutality. He has recourse to it in the last part, in four time, where the voice of the unhappy Fides is strained over the insignificant and violent conclusion of a mediocre sonata by Spohr. Thus having produced in succession style, virtuosity and brutality, he may be supposed to have left no single hearer in the room unsatisfied.*

Speaking generally, you have only to make the experiment of putting side by side, from no matter what score of Meyerbeer, three passages taken from different acts. (Naturally the experiment will not be instructive unless you are well acquainted with the masters, and have acquired by these studies certain habits of mind). You will recognise that to assemble in one work such heterogeneous manners of writing required a blender who had little scruple about style, and that the work which juxtaposes them belongs truly to the realm of musical curios.

Let us take our three passages from the *Huguenots*—say for example, the women's chorus "Fresh beauties"—a page of Donizetti with a more flowery accompaniment; the nocturnal scene between Valentine and Marcel, manufactured Mozart, and the duet in the fourth act, in which there is something of everything. "Sir! The duet from the Huguenots?" I fancy some old concert-goer exclaiming; "What, do you not spare even that illustrious page, to which you yourself seemed but now to be paying homage?" I do not take back what I said; one would have to

* Very characteristic too in the duet of Berthe and Fides is the juxtaposition of the phrase, "God will guide me" (Handel) with that which immediately follows, "My eyes can only weep," a plaintive melody of Bellini.

be the slave of scholastic or other prejudices to deny to this duet, so well placed too from the melodramatic point of view, its qualities of warmth and eloquence, its very powerful effect. But one would have to be a barbarian or an ignoramus not to notice that it is written in a blended and impure style, and that from one phrase to another there is a constant change of musical idiom and musical spirit.

There is no need for me to multiply my proofs. But it important that I have taken them only from the "best" passages. What would happen if I tackled what I have called Meyerbeer's rubbish heap—that rubbish heap which in the total weight of his work represents no small proportion of kilogrammes! Meyerbeer is appalling when the kindly Muse of *Reflection* does not come to his aid, or at least does not bring him sufficiently definite assistance. As types of these passages, rich in notes but empty of meaning, one may quote: in a falsely sentimental or elegant style, "Whiter than the ermine white," "For Bertha I sigh:" in a gravely dramatic style, the whole of the second act of the *Africaine*, except the phrase, "Daughter of Kings." Those to whom the troubadour and time-piece-picture style are still dear will also enjoy the air of Sleep. It is a curious thing that this *Africaine* which taken as a whole is the most insufferable of Meyerbeer's scores (the unique ineptitude of the "book" has something to do with that) is also the work in which occur the few really attractive pages that he wrote,-"Wonderful Land," and the first part of the manchineal scene. I do not include the famous prelude, which is absolutely hollow and owes its well-known effect merely to a certain illusory charm of instrumentation.

What is most offensive in Meyerbeer is the rhythms,

those heavy crushing rhythms from which he never manages, if I may put it so, to extricate himself ; they betray the lack of breed in his music, just as it often happens that the gait of a man who has arrived at aping a great politeness of manner which deceives nearly everybody, offers to some more observant eyes the living witness of a coarse and vain nature.

In a passionate article against the *Huguenots*, in which however the merits of Meyerbeer are fully recognised and described, Schumann wrote that everthing in his music is " fake, appearance, and hypocrisy." Without subscribing to a contradiction of this cruel formula, I would say with more moderation, that by playing the weakest pages of Rossini or Verdi after the best-filled pages of Meyerbeer, one almost always gets the feeling of leaving a stifling atmosphere and stepping into the open air.

VIII

I know admirers of Meyerbeer into whose illusion there enters an element of truth.

They are struck with the terrible errors of doctrine and practice in our contemporary theatre music, and they contrast these errors with the example of Meyerbeer. The enthusiasts I have in mind deplore, and quite rightly to my thinking, the excessive intrusion into opera of the symphonic style, and the abandonment of all the old forms and moulds of dramatic music, which used to have great virtue and were founded, to speak the truth, on the very nature of this branch of art. (As to that, all that is needed is to rejuvenate them, correcting those aspects which offend our taste.) These critics deplore also the renunciation of all the spectacu-

lar part of the opera of tradition, which as long as it was confined to its proper place and inspired by intelligence and taste gave music a magnificent field of expansion. It is because they are against these departures from the right road that they love Meyerbeer, but in that I think they are wrong.

Meyerbeer practised all that they lay down. But he practised it by corrupting it, coarsening it and debasing, it. He practised it as a cosmopolitan manipulator, strongly and brilliantly endowed indeed, far more than as an artist in blood and race. He thus did a great deal to destroy the authority of the very tradition with which hasty consideration connects him, though he had nothing of its spirit, and he it was who made an opening for the Wagnerian invasion. If Meyerbeer's music had really been French nothing would have been more justifiable than that invasion. But French music is something quite different.

The Meyerbeer style has been disastrous to music, because it inspired a contempt for it, or at the very least a lack of interest in it, among a considerable part of the intellectual élite of France. There we have a new fact of the nineteenth century. Before that time all our best people were passionately devoted to music. But how many fastidious minds who only knew it by this spoilt art-form, refused to take an interest in an art which they thought necessarily implied, on its literary side, a foundation of absurdity.

The Meyerbeer style has been disastrous outside the realm of art by its influence on the historical and political ideas of the French people. In the days when it flourished how many good people, especially in the provinces, never opened a book, but used to go to the theatre to hear *Robert, The Huguenots, The Prophet,*

L'Africaine, and drew from no other source their notions and judgments on the middle ages, French royalty, religious wars and the Inquisition !

From the musical point of view this style of art has been and was bound to be utterly sterile. All that one can say is that it has marked a stage in a development from which music is very far from having derived nothing but benefits, and largely of Germanic origin. I refer to the exaggerated increase of the orchestral mass.

There are people to-day who would like to stir up enthusiasm for Meyerbeer by emphasising that it was Wagner who killed him. No doubt he did, but in France Berlioz, Gounod, Bizet and Massenet contributed infinitely more than Wagner to the result.

Meyerbeer is dead, stone dead. *Multa renascentur*, many things will come to life again, as the poet says, and I hope that in time soon to come music will see many purely French things come to life again on the ruins of the German mania which choked them. Meyerbeer will not come to life again. His apologists plead the brilliance of his success. Certainly, it is an argument. But those successes belong to the worst period that French art has known.

CHAPTER V

WAGNER THE POET

The war, while banishing the name of Richard Wagner from the posters of our concerts and theatres has restored his works to the agenda of criticism. It has revived on the subject of the *Tetralogy*, *Tristan*, and *Parsifal*, controversies which might have been thought to be dead and which take us back thirty years. We have no reason to complain of that. The " sacred union " has not suffered, and truth can only gain by it. The testing of time renders easier the equitable appreciation of works of art ; and in the case of Wagner's work this test has been long enough to give us the advantage of due perspective. We to-day can turn upon this vast and complex monument of poetry, music and theatrical decoration a gaze more free and clear than could our elders, when they saw it rise for the first time before their astonished and dazzled eyes. The time will come, and it will come by victory, when reasons lying deep in the fitness of things which ruled that the author of the *Tetralogy* must be excluded from our dramatic and musical repertories will no longer exist, and it will then be for considerations of taste to decide whether or no Wagner is to be played, or to what extent he is to be played. But the decision of which public feeling will allow in this matter, the practice that will be established, will have all the more wisdom and authority if they are inspired by a taste that is well informed and thoroughly enlightened on the nature and value of Wagner's

work, and on the quality of the influence that it has exercised and is still capable of exercising in our country. By giving ourselves up to this examination with the impartiality and calm that it demands we shall, on one important question, be making beforehand our dispositions for " after the war " !

I

The question is a very wide one. I do not intend to study it here in its totality ; of the two great aspects under which it presents itself, I shall only consider one. Wagner produced work both as a poet and as a musician. I will speak of the poet. I will try to characterise and judge Wagner's dramatic poems.

Beyond doubt the subject when thus limited is open to one objection. It may be said that dramas destined to be translated into music and only written with that object, form with their music a living and indissoluble whole. By separating the elements of this whole in order to make them the subject of two distinct analyses, shall we not inflict on both a sort of mutilation, shall we not deprive them of a part of their meaning ?

There lies a difficulty against which we must indeed be on our guard. But that does not mean that we must withdraw the Wagnerian dramas from the test of a separate investigation. As Descartes said in effect, there is only one way of settling questions, and that is to begin by dividing them. This is especially true of such complex and many-sided questions as this. When it is intended to judge seriously a work of musical drama the first thing necessary is to study the drama by itself. Drama in music is still drama. As such

it must have its own substance ; it presents us with a story, characters, passions, characterisation ; it rests on a certain basis of ideas. All this it should normally be possible to understand without the music ; these things ought to offer in themselves an interest that is independent of the music. No doubt at a mere reading the imagination will not associate itself with this interest as keenly as might be desired ; those poems will not produce the emotion or exhale the poetry which when they are heard, may be the chief attraction, and which depend above all on the music. But one to whose mind this music is familiar could not re-read these dramas without hearing the music singing in the words, without seeing the situations coloured by it. And if he gives an analysis or description of the dramatic stories of Wagner, the lines with which he draws them will find themselves quite naturally impregnated with this musical colouring, and they will not have the comparative dryness of the bare text.

This method seems undoubtedly the right one. But however much the question in general may be open to debate, there is, where Wagner is concerned, a reason of fact which imposes it on us, and renders especially necessary a previous and separate study of the Wagnerian dramas. In the very considerable influence exercised in France by Wagner's work, his dramatic poems have had their own independent share. I am quite ready to agree that they have owed their influence solely to the renown of the music which accompanied or supported them, and I admit that without its aid they would not simply as samples of German literature have succeeded in capturing the attention of Frenchmen. But once introduced within our borders by this powerful musical medium, they

somehow detached themselves from it; they had their own separate success; they attained prominence by themselves. They have not lacked great admirers, nor makers of glosses and scholiasts to elucidate their mysteries. They have been read by many with gravity and in the expectation of finding great things in them. They have conquered the imagination of artists, have provided painters with inspiration, and certain poetic schools with myths and themes of meditation on which they have freely embroidered; they have even furnished the model of a form of expression for imitation. Doctrines have been sought in them; the Wagnerian conceptions have added credit or at the very least attractiveness to certain mystic ideologies, to certain religious movements arising from the same tendencies. In short, Wagner brought into France not only a music but also a literature. And this literature has had its share for the last forty years in the intellectual culture of a considerable class of Frenchmen. It has scattered a thousand germs in our mental atmosphere. The student who cares to collect in detail the evidences of its action will find matter for a big volume. I would add (and the fact must be reckoned with) that this action has been so easily spread abroad because in many respects it went hand in hand with the great Germanic influences which have been making themselves felt in our country for a century past.

II

The sources of Wagnerian literature are known. They are mythical and historical legends of Germany and the Scandinavian countries, presented to the

German people in ancient and modern versions or adaptations; also romances of the Breton cycle translated or adapted as far back as the middle ages by German writers such as Wolfram of Eschenbach and Gottfried of Strasburg. These are the sources from which Wagner drew the subjects of his dramas, except that work of his youth, *Rienzi*. These subjects were very much in vogue in German literature in the days of his youth. The taste with which they inspired him was nothing new, it was the prevailing taste of the time. The most marked feature of this period of German literature, the period which followed Goethe and is by general agreement called the romantic period, was a great vogue for the old national literature, a great zeal for its revival. And it was not only Germany's historians, students and philologists who devoted themselves to this undertaking. Her poets, romance-writers and dramatic authors contributed to it in their own way by themselves taking from this distant source the plots and characters of their fictions. Tieck, Lamotte-Fougué, Hoffman, Novalis, Immermann, Heine, to say nothing of a legion of obscure authors, dealt with all Wagner's subjects before Wagner. They told or sang of the Flying Dutchman, Tannhäuser, Lohengrin, Tristan, Parsifal, Siegfried. "There were in existence," says the learned H. Lichtenberger, "a crowd of tragedies on the *Nibelungen*." Thus Wagner the poet is not an independent or isolated phenomenon. He belongs to the literary school of German romanticism which covers the first half of the nineteenth century.

The works of his first period, *the Phantom Ship*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* constitute as regards their inspiration and their form a distinct group in the

total of his creations. But the three have enough in common to make us content with a few remarks on the last of the three.

We find in *Lohengrin* that part of the theme is truly poetic, stamped with real humanity and lacking in its developments neither simplicity nor grace. Take for example all the part dealing with the feelings of Elsa towards Ortrude, her deadly enemy. Ortrude has contrived a diabolical plot for the ruin and dishonour of Elsa. Unmasked and defeated she appeals to the girl's pity and begs her to restore her in the eyes of the world by reconciliation: but this is only in order to find opportunity for the hideous vengeance she is meditating. Elsa is far more sorry for her wickedness than for her misfortune (wickedness being indeed the greater misfortune), and grants her not only pity but friendship; rendered happy by love she thinks she would be ungrateful for her own good fortune if she hardened her heart even against this wicked woman. Everyone knows well the charm of the setting devised by the poet's scenic inventiveness for the expression of these feelings. The ingenuous raptures of Elsa's love for her knight have a charm no less natural and pure. And the triumph of this love in the splendour and glory of nuptial pomp provides not merely a scene and a spectacular effect; there is wafted by the pageant of these celebrations a breath of youth and untroubled enthusiasm.

Though the knights of the Grail, of whom *Lohengrin* is one, belong to the world of miracle, yet the terrestrial mission that they allot themselves, which often summons them far from their sacred abode to the region of ordinary mortals, has an object and a motive that appeal to the mind and heart, namely the defence

of justice and oppressed innocence. That is what gives a noble and clear meaning, a moving grandeur to the magical arrival of Lohengrin ; touched by the last appeal of Elsa, to whom he has already presented himself in a dream, he comes and places her under the protection of his sword and his honour. Are we to be astonished that he falls in love with her ? The knights of the Grail may well have, side by side with their mystic super-human vocation, a share in human sensibility, seeing that they are grievously moved by human injustice.

But at this point arises a situation which it is difficult to treat humanly. Elsa becomes the wife of a demi-god, and it so happens that this demi-god can only prolong his sojourn on earth incognito. If his personality and origin are discovered the charm which keeps him there is broken and he must go. Accordingly he makes Elsa swear never to ask him about himself, or she will see him vanish into the air from which he came. It seems to me that at this point the theme loses dignity, savours of the childish, of the fairy story, and that it becomes impossible to develop it in a natural manner while adhering to the poetic and lofty tone of other portions of the work. Imagine not knowing to whom one is married ! Might it not be perhaps with the devil, who is so clever at taking all sorts of shapes ? Such a condition imposed in the name of love engenders of itself a sort of entirely physical anguish that must paralyse the sentiment. How could a young bride fail to feel the obsession of it ? How should she not lend ear to all that her women neighbours would whisper to her ? Elsa is not a wife whose conscience is struggling against a temptation of moral infidelity, but a little girl who has

been forbidden to draw a certain curtain or open a certain door, who is haunted by the thought of doing so and does not resist it. Parody dogs the steps of this part of the story. Nietzsche, with his passion for satirising Wagner, quite saw this. "Lohengrin, or the importance of making sure of the civil status of the person one marries," is the way he puts it. It is only too easy no doubt to ridicule a fine work which offers one absurd aspect, and I readily allow that the unity of tone, sustained inspiration, and fine radiance of the music, correct or minimise in the performance the effect of disproportion and inequality resulting from this absurd element mingled with elements that are natural and noble. These defects are none the less real, and not to be shocked at this infantile aspect of the drama one must surely have an imagination that lacks culture, and is very easily pleased.

This drama has, according to Wagner, a high philosophic trend. But there is one strange point—or rather, it is only too comprehensible—to which I cannot too emphatically draw attention. What we find infantile in his theme is precisely what he himself, when he undertakes to annotate it and bring out its philosophic meaning, thinks greatest. And those elements of invention of which we can scarcely make sense are the very ones to convey, according to him, the most precious and sublime meanings. Listen to him—this is German!

"Elsa is the unconscious, the spontaneous, in the bosom of which the conscious, thoughtful being of Lohengrin aspires to find its deliverance (or, its redemption: *Erlösung*); but this aspiration itself is traceable to the unconscious, necessary, and spontaneous element in Lohengrin's being, by which he feels his

affinity to the being of Elsa. Thanks to the power of this 'unconscious conscience,' as I experienced it myself with Lohengrin, I arrived at a comprehension growing more and more intimate of feminine nature; I succeeded in plunging myself so completely in the feminine being that I expressed it in a manner worthy of that complete penetration in my Elsa the lover. I could not prevent myself from finding the latter absolutely justified in the final explosion of her jealousy, and it was precisely that explosion which for the first time enlightened me thoroughly on the purely human essential quality of love. This woman who, with a clear vision of what she is doing, hurls herself to her doom out of regard for the necessary essential quality of love—who, given up to the feelings of an enthusiastic adoration, wills to go under if she cannot possess her well-beloved in his entirety; this woman who, from the fact of her contact with Lohengrin was destined just so to go under, only by the same stroke to give him over to his destruction: this woman who acts thus and cannot act otherwise, who by the explosion of her jealousy passes from a state of charmed adoration to the essential plenitude of love, and who in going under reveals its essential quality to the man who did not yet understand it: this magnificent woman before whom Lohengrin was to disappear, because from the point of view of his special nature he could not understand her—this woman I had now discovered, and the first arrow that I launched towards the noble object, already foreshadowed but not known, of my discovery, was my Lohengrin, to whose loss I had to consent in order to remain true to my aim of the true feminine, which is to bring redemption to me and the entire world, when before it masculine egoism,

even under the noblest form, shall have broken itself, being itself annihilated. Elsa the woman—Woman till now not understood and now understood, that very necessary essential expression of pure sensitive spontaneity—has made of me a thorough revolutionary. She was the spirit of the people, of which I too as artist felt the need, for my redemption."

You do not quite follow? But it is partly that the German language is terrible, with all those amphibious words in whose signification sensation and idea mingle and encroach on each other in a manner so confused that it is practically impossible for us to translate them; for, to the honour of our intellectual and moral civilisation we have not their equivalents in French. In this flux of invertebrate phrases, one conception, which if not clear is at any rate very strongly tendencious, yet allows itself to be discerned. Reason, knowledge, experience, deliberate thought, all the "conscious" and organised forms of our inner life, imprison us in the bonds from which we must "deliver" ourselves by some undefined yielding to the suggestions or intuitions of pure and instinctive sensibility, as man "delivers himself" of himself in the bosom of a woman, delivers himself of egoism in the bosom of love. And sensibility, emancipated from reflection is identified with what Wagner calls the "spirit of the people," an ideal of all innocence, kindness and genius.

There you have something muddy, and moreover disquieting. Let us meet it with healthy French laughter.

III

Despite these explanations by Wagner, *Lohengrin* (and one must say the same of *Tannhäuser* and the

Phantom Ship) presents itself as a sufficiently simple work. In it the author follows almost line for line the incidents of the old mediæval legend, heightening them with straightforward and sometimes beautiful poetic developments. We could read and re-read the text and suspect none of the extraordinary meanings which his commentary would have us discover in them. But had he thought of putting those meanings in it himself? Did he not introduce them after the work was done? There are very strong reasons for thinking that he did so. The strongest is obtained from a comparison of dates. *Lohengrin* is three years earlier than the year 1848. The *Communication to my friends*, which gives the commentary on it, is two years after that date. For anyone who knows Wagner's moral history that explains everything. The revolution of 1848 had a deep and violent influence on him, it caused a real crisis in his ideas. Till then his mental activity had been applied solely to his art; on everything else he had held the average opinions of a peaceable subject of the king of Saxony. Here we find him calling in question all received opinions and beginning I will not say to meditate but to dream about the foundations of civilisation and society. The so-called explanation of the meaning of his first dramas is in reality a manifesto of his new thoughts. But as he became from this moment a passionate theorist, without however, ceasing to be a poet, we find him no longer relegating the expression of his theories to the annotations on his dramas; he propagates them in the dramas themselves. That is the new characteristic of the *Nibelungen Ring* as compared with *Lohengrin*.

This new bent of his mind, which henceforth re-

mained for Wagner, subject to slight variations, a definite tendency, has however no originality. It gives no evidence of any personal effort of reflection. It is a beaten track, but he follows it with as much feverish ardour as if he had hewn it out by his own initiative. He embraces his ideas with passion, but he is not in any sense their creator. He received them from the ambient air. In German philosophic and literary circles of the nineteenth century there were no ideas more widely received ; the source from which he draws them occupied in German thought of that century the position of an ordinary commonplace. That commonplace consists in what might be called the cult of the primitive, in the identification of the primitive with the ideal. The supposition, or the dream, is that all the creations of thought and of the human soul, all the instutitions of human life, poetry, religion, morality, law, once had a primitive state, a primitive form, superior to all the forms they have subsequently assumed, which is the excelling type by which all the rest must be judged, and to which a return must be made.

Considered in itself this ideology is the cloudiest and vainest in the world ; there is nothing corresponding to it in the reality of things. The primitive state is an entity devoid of sense. But what has no sense as an expression of the real may have some as the expression of certain tendencies. And it is easy to recognise in the ideology of the primitive the expression of the ethical and national tendencies, aspirations and pretensions of modern Germany. Up to the end of the eighteenth century Germany had felt herself and recognised herself to be a backwater of the traditional European culture of which

the Latin nations received the direct heritage from Greece and Rome. At that moment, for reasons the explanation of which would require a general review of history, a fierce need of emancipation and separation took possession of her; she decided to affirm in all the manifestations of the mind her own independent personality.

Meanwhile she found herself behind other western peoples, especially the French, in civilisation, and had nothing original to set against the old common culture from which it was her pretension to emancipate herself. How was Germany to bring this situation and this ambition into harmony? There was only one way, that she should turn this very backwardness, with all that it implied of comparative rudeness and barbarism, into a boast; that she should interpret her apparent inferiority as the sign of a real superiority. And this, with the aid of her philosophers, she did. Strong in the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of whom one may say that he was to prove, though without intention, the prophet of German national thought, these philosophers furnished her with grounds for depreciation of the acquired perfections which compose an outstanding civilisation, depreciation of the learned classical discipline of reason, depreciation of politeness of taste and manners; thus providing at the same time grounds for admiration of Germany, who had kept closer to nature. This comparison, entirely to their own advantage, marked out their path for the Germans and fired them with enthusiasm. The return to Nature for them meant a return to their own nature. By discarding the artificial training to which they had too long been slaves, they would restore themselves morally to the original

and first condition of humanity, and find once more its divine inspirations. Thus was formed the principle of a new culture, the starting point of a new career for philosophy, poetry and criticism. It is true that it was not particularly easy to represent the Primitive, as thus conceived, by clear cut notions. But ought it not of itself to lend itself better to a shadowy intuition? And for the purpose of appealing to this intuition, the German tongue has a resource all her own, the prefix *Ur*, which placed before the name of anything signifies its absolutely initial form, its remotest genesis: *Ur-anfang*, the beginning of the beginning: *Ur-grund*, the reason anterior to all reasons that can be apprehended: *Ur-stimmung*, the hidden state of soul underlying the state of soul of which we are conscious. Since *Volk* means in German "people," the German people was *Ur-volk*, the type of nationality intended and created by Nature, non-artificial.

With the idea of the primitive were closely associated those of the popular (*volkstümlich*), the spontaneous (*unwillkürlich*) and the unconscious (*unbewusst*). These concepts are practically interchangeable. The creations of culture are aristocratic and deliberate creations. The creations of nature are the work of all, they are produced artlessly, by a collective, unconscious and spontaneous generation. With an extraordinary lack of taste German criticism persisted in finding these common characteristics in poetical compositions matured in stages of civilisation so unequal, and belonging to such different antiquities as the *Nibelungen*, the Bible, and the poems of Homer. They did so simply on the ground that these works were the most ancient in date that had been trans-

mitted to us by the various national literatures to which they belonged.

One might discuss the limits of the influence, in any case very wide, exercised in Germany by these conceptions. But the discussion would be without interest for us, since, so far as Richard Wagner is concerned, this influence was unlimited. It would be impossible to be more subject to it than he was. He was absolutely possessed by it. He may have subsequently discovered other ideas; he may have changed, I will not say his principles (how attribute principles to a mind of this quality, all passion and mobility?) but at least his sentiments, impressions and impulses. His faith in the primitive and its ideal value adapted itself to these successive orientations; by doing so it took on some new tints but was not weakened. If anyone has found in his theoretical writings as many as thirty lines in which the following expressions do not recur *ad nauseam*, I should like to see them: *rein menschlich* (purely human), *urmenschlich* (primitively human), *willkürlich* and *unwillkürlich* (deliberate and spontaneous), *unbewusst* (unconscious). With these words, which do not mean much, Wagner imagines he has said all there is to be said.

It is true that I have traced to the national passions of the German people, if not the very origin of this ideology, at least the unprecedented favour that it enjoyed. And on the other hand the Wagner of 1848 appears to us to be far removed from nationalist preoccupations. He is as he says "utterly revolutionary." There is no contradiction in this. The ideology of German nationalism, and the revolutionary ideology (which must on no account be confused with the positive and definite ideas of reform contained in

the programme of such and such a political revolution) start from the same point ; they are to say truth the same ideology, considered in two different applications and lending itself with equal facility to either. In what name does Germany attack the tradition of the old European and classical culture ? In the name of the inspirations of primitive humanity. In what name does the spirit of revolution attack institutions and laws in general ? In the name of primitive rights. The kinship of these two movements of ideas is very close and obvious, and it explains why, among the nations of Europe, Germany is the only one in which the revolutionary spirit has not weakened the national spirit. For the great welders of imperial unity, when they have become the masters of public opinion, it is an undertaking based on nature and the affinities of things to turn the current of one of these ideas into the other, to attract the revolutionary movement into the nationalist movement, and to capture for the profit of the latter the moral energies and forces of sentiment engaged in the first. At the point of history with which we are now concerned, this work is only faintly foreshadowed. The revolutionary spirit which stirs Wagner is still cosmopolitan. But there would not be many changes to make in the terms of his message to convert the writings containing its expression into regular manifestos of proselytic Germanism.

IV

Being the work of the ideologue as much as of the poet, the *Nibelungen Ring* or *Tetralogy* generally passes for a very obscure composition. And I am far

from saying that its reputation is not well-earned. This drama in four dramas would deserve that opinion even if the author had not put into it other conceptions that are anything but clear besides those which I have just sketched. But if these conceptions provide the *Ring* with its principle and dominant themes, they do not constitute it entirely. There are several others added, which seem to me to have a relation with those first ones analogous to that of musical variations with their theme. Taken all together they form a sort of universal system embracing the totality of things human and divine. And it is indeed true that some parts of this system are calculated to reduce the most resolute exponent of it to despair.

The *Ring*, then, is obscure. But is it unique in its obscurity? I think not, and I am astonished that among the aspects it presents this is the only one usually emphasised. Side by side with its symbolic meanings, which themselves are only partially, not wholly, wrapped in darkness, it offers us a story that is very clear and easily understood as soon as one stops looking too eagerly for symbolism. Its clearness is of two sorts according to which of two themes one chooses to study. One is the sort of clearness which is proper to fanciful stories and fairy tales, and one could not ask for anything more vivid, seeing that it satisfies the mind of a little child. The other is somewhat out of range of the young, but is no more difficult to understand than a novel or drama in the fashion of 1830, a novel or drama by Georges Sand or Dumas, such as *Lelia*, *Indiana*, *Jacques* or *Antony*, inspired by the defence of free love and the rights of nature against the slavery and prejudice of marriage and laws. It does not really

aggravate the difficulty, that the characters in this romance instead of being taken from the lower-middle classes of France and Germany are taken from Germanic mythology and prehistoric legend; especially when, from above the clouds or out of the abysm of time they address us in the language in use yesterday or the day before and quite familiar to us. In these two senses the *Ring* is a very clear work. The fantastic on a vast scale, a chain of wonderful stories put on the stage, and a romance modelled on the old romantic theses of sentimental anarchism, the whole mixed with certain riddles of metaphysical terminology, that for my part I think are only too easily deciphered, such are the elements of which the invention of the Tetralogy is composed.

I will summarise its story in as consecutive a manner as possible.

In the luminous depths of the Rhine, the gnome Alberich pursues the water-sprites who elude him and mock him, springing from rock to rock. But while thus disporting themselves they neglect to guard the divine treasure entrusted to them, comprising Gold, the Ring and the Helm; the Ring is capable of procuring for its possessor the sovereignty of the universe; the Helm is the instrument of all metamorphoses. The dwarf, forced to abandon the pursuit of the fair daughters of the wave, and preferring the joys of greed and power to those of unattainable love, gets possession of these magic objects. Changed into a monster he thinks he is secure against robbers. But he has reckoned without Wotan, the master of the gods, who on the advice of his gossip Loge (the Mercury of Nordic mythology) comes to the cave of Alberich, and defies him to change himself into a toad; the fool

immediately does so, and the two robbers take advantage of it to lay hands on the treasure. Why did Wotan covet it? Because he needed it to reward the two giants who had built for him the celestial palace of Valhalla; he had promised them, (the trifler!) as payment, his tempting step-sister, Freia, the Venus of this Olympus; intending of course to send the louts about their business when on the termination of their task they should come to take delivery of the prize. But by the wise counsel of the far-seeing Erda, goddess of the earth, who emerges from the ground as far as her waist to gain his hearing, Wotan renounces this blackguardly action which would be fatal to the race of gods, and in exchange for Freia offers the giants the treasure of Alberich. It is exchanging one knavery for another, robbing a robber.

From this moment Wotan has lost his divine felicity. Does he not carry, inscribed on the handle of his lance the "Runes" of loyalty, the protective maxims of the Laws and Contracts? By violating them he has shattered the foundations of the universal order which depends upon his sovereign will, and how can he atone for this violation, having himself sanctioned it by a new contract? In inextricable trouble of conscience he goes to consult Erda in the bosom of the Earth, and to lend charm to a conversation of which the subject must have been rather vague—judging from what we .learn of it from the Wagnerian Tetralogy—he presents her with nine beautiful daughters all at once; these are the Valkyrs, Warrior goddesses, whose mission it is to be to bring back the brave who have fallen in battle and escort them to Valhalla, to the court of the gods. The upshot of the consultation with Erda is that it is beyond the power of Wotan

to make amends for the iniquity accomplished ; reparation can now only come from the race of men. But the god does not trust himself to the powers of an ordinary man for the re-establishment of the order which his divine follies have destroyed. Though it is hardly playing fair (but is he not a cheat by nature ?) he thinks it well to have a hand in the business. He unites himself to a mortal in order to give the earth a breed of exceptional men, of heroes. These are called the Wälsungen. Wotan leaves them to their own resources, and their fate is hard. These sons of heaven and of the light are pursued by the hate of Alberich and his ugly kinsmen and brood, which comprises all beings who are led by cupidity and servile instincts and is consequently very numerous. One of them, Siegmund, finding in the wife of the wicked and brutal Hunding his sister Sieglinde, from whom he was separated while still a child, and who has been married by force, frees her and woos her. This deed of high emprise seems to promise others ; for Siegmund is possessor of a wonderful sword, which Wotan (who cannot make up his mind to play straight) had planted in the trunk of a certain ash tree, knowing that his descendant alone would be strong enough to wrench it out. Moreover Siegmund is protected by the Valkyr Brünnhilde, her father's favourite, who is admitted to the secret of his wishes and intimate thoughts. She prepares to support him in his coming fight with Hunding, whose defeat is therefore certain.

But while these things are happening on earth, there are storms in heaven. Strife is muttering in the household of the gods. Wotan has to endure the reproaches of his wife Fricka (the Juno to his Jupiter) a narrow and harsh personality, who asks him if he

is now going to make himself the abettor of incest, and ruin by his divine authority the old morality. In vain poor Wotan groans and protests. The Runes are there, he must obey. Inhuman though this task may appear to him, he must accomplish it. At the very moment when Hunding is about to succumb to the blows of Siegmund who is covered by Brünnhilde's shield, he joins the fray, and with the shock of his lance breaks the magic spear of his grandson, and Hunding then deals him a mortal blow. But the clown in turn falls stricken by a glance from the god ; it now only remains for the latter to chastise the rebellion of his daughter. She as we understand was only rebellious in having conformed to the real wish of her father, in having acted according to Wotan's will. He prepares to banish her from the race of immortals. But at her entreaties he consents to a modification of the punishment. He will send her to sleep in the midst of the forest and will surround her slumber with a barrier of fire. Brünnhilde shall belong to none but the man who is bold enough to come through the fire, to the man " Who knows not fear." Will he not indeed deserve such a conquest ? And will it not be worth while, for the love of this gay fellow, to become a mere mortal ?

The unfortunate Sieglinde forsaken in the woods dies while bringing into the world Siegmund's child : Siegfried. She has had the help of the dwarf Mime, a skilful blacksmith, a brother of Alberich ; he is still smaller and uglier than he, but far more mischievous. On her death-bed she has entrusted to Mime, with her son, the fragments of the wonderful sword collected beside Siegmund's corpse. Sigefried is reared by Mime, that is to say he is not reared ; he grows

like a wild plant or a young animal—he knows nothing of society, mankind or laws; he is pure spontaneity, nature itself in its unfettered expansion. Despising Mime, who does not exist in his eyes, he only knows himself and the sky; he therefore possesses instinttively all the virtues, not forgetting muscles of iron; he is intrepid, kind, generous, charming, delicate, chivalrous; all this is as natural to him as breathing. In short, he, Siegfried, is the man expected, the man at once summoned and feared by Wotan, who is to free and redeem the world from the antique laws to which Wotan holds it subject, not without feeling weariness and disgust.

Mime also has views on his nursling, whom he regards as a great simpleton. With arms like his to wield the magic sword, it should be mere child's play to Siegfried to slay the giant Fafner, who in the guise of a hideous and formidable dragon passes his life sprawling over the treasure of which he is now the possessor. Once the feat is accomplished, it will only remain for the cunning dwarf to offer the youth a certain refreshing draught that will send him to sleep for eternity, and to appropriate the Treasure himself. However, Mime is powerless to weld together the fragments of the spear, the metal being too hard for his strength. Siegfried does it with ease; he slays the dragon, despatches Mime who offers him the draught, and while lying stretched on the grass in the forest hears a bird singing, and is quite bewildered to find he understands its song. It is the dragon's blood with which he has been splashed that gives him this power. The bird reveals to him among other secrets the value of the treasure and the existence of the maiden surrounded by fire. Siegfried rushes to undertake this conquest.

In vain Wotan presents himself before him to bar the road with his lance. Siegfried cuts it in two, even as Wotan had done to Siegmund.

I hasten over the last part of the story. Siegfried devotes himself to his mission of liberation, and leaves Brünnhilde, to whom he will return from time to time to rest after his exploits. He reaches the court of the princes of the Rhine. One of them, Hagen, the bastard son of Alberich, gives him to drink a philtre of forgetfulness. Brünnhilde fades at once from his memory, and he marries Gutrune, sister of the king Gunther. The latter has heard of the divine maid shut in by a circle of fire, and dreams of making her his wife. Siegfried offers to win her for him and bring her to his court; he will borrow Gunther's features, using the magical power of disguise which the helm gives him. This is accomplished and produces a domestic tragedy. Brünnhilde, Gutrune and Gunther believe themselves betrayed by Siegfried—for he alone (with Hagen) knows his good faith. Hagen slays him out hunting by striking him on the only vulnerable spot in his body, which has been revealed to him by Alberich. Then the truth is divulged to all, and Brünnhilde climbs on to the pyre prepared for the body of her first and true husband. I must not forget to mention that Siegfried strolling on the banks of the Rhine had been importuned by the water-spirites to return to them their treasure, and had readily done so. Thus he had finally made amends for the original iniquity. And that I suppose is the reason why there was nothing left for him but to die. With him die the gods, Valhalla falls, and all are hurled into the waters of the river. Siegfried has existed for no other purpose than

to free the universe from the ancient servitude of of Gold and the Laws, and by that very fact belongs to the reign of Gold and the Laws, and must disappear with it, together with the gods who upheld it. He has no justification for existence in a universe in which will shine the spendour of an entirely new law; this Brünnhilde on her pyre announces will be the law of Love. That is what I make of this conclusion, what I seem to discern in the dust of the ruins of Valhalla.

V

The subject matter of these stories was borrowed by Wagner from the old Germanic-Scandinavian poem of the Nibelungen. One can understand the attraction it must have exercised, apart from all philosophic and symbolic aims, on a composer of operas the bent of whose mind led him in the direction of spectacular opera. For such is indeed the trend of Wagner's mind, at any rate such is one of the faculties that constituted his genius; he has a passionate taste for theatrical decoration and the composition of scenic effects; he adores their fascination, and he has a wonderful aptitude for their processes and artifices. Initiated early in all the mysteries of the boards by his step-father, Geyer, who was both an actor and a decorative painter, he was able to apply confidently his rare powers of imagination to scenic inventions: he would have made his fortune as a promoter of pantomimes if he had not been a great musician. Among the attractions which he found in the fable of the *Nibelungen*, not the least was the quality of the scenic effects to which it lent itself. The under-water Rhine caves, with the gambolling of the water sprites, the palace of the gods in the clouds, the cavern of the Nibelungen and the metamorphoses of Alberich,

the rides of the Valkyrs, the combat of Siegfried and the dragon, Brünnhilde sleeping surrounded by a rampart of flames, the crumbling of Valhalla and its fall through space, all these combinations of marvels and landscape, of magic and nature, lent themselves to rich and wondrous imagery mounted on cardboard and wire, and promised rich entertainment to the eyes of spectators.

It is true that we French have also had spectacular opera, under the name of opera-ballet, and the works of the greatest and most exquisite of our musicians, Rameau, belong partly to this class. But the element of the marvellous in Rameau's operas is taken from classical mythology, that is to say from the most imaginative and most artistic nation in the world, from the inventions of the greatest poets of antiquity, Hesiod, Homer, Vergil, Ovid ; it is permeated throughout with humanity, grace, irony and wit. The traditional figures and images by which it is represented are full of style, having been modelled by the genius of the Italian painters of the renaissance. The marvellous element in Wagner is taken, and taken raw, from a barbarous literature. It has indeed its own savour and colour ; it is by no means lacking in a certain heavy humour. But it has a character of exaggeration and childishness, and the result is that for French taste (and we have I take it no reason for abjuring in honour of Wagner a taste which is our pride) it would be more in place at the Châtelet theatre, where we take our children, than in works that aim at grandeur of style and nobility of moral impression. We should take far more pleasure in it did not the author by mixing philosophy with it ask us to contemplate such scenes in a more serious spirit than is possible for us who are not

Germans. This combination of philosophy and machinery, of the abstract and string-pulling, makes us want to laugh. But Frenchmen and Germans do not laugh at the same things. The fantastic element when it represents something philosophic or historic is regarded gravely by the Germans, especially if it is on a " colossal " scale. It makes them think.

Let us recognise, however, that all this decorative part of Wagner's operas has not merely a perceptible attraction. It has also an element of poetic value if not in itself at any rate in the allurements that it holds out to the richest inspirations of the musician. Wagner as a musician excels in painting great landscapes ; or more exactly in evoking for the imagination the hidden springs and profound rhythms of the natural forces manifested in the powerful undulations of a river's volume, the graceful or majestic course of the clouds, the murmurs of the trees, the play of light and shadow. His fantastic scenes are developed in the midst of these phenomena of nature, which may be said to take no less important a part in them than the characters themselves.

Yet it is very necessary that the latter should hold their own place in the scheme. Whatever influence picturesque or musical considerations may have had on the turn given by Wagner to the story of the *Nibelungen*, he was bound, since he was making a drama out of it, to be pre-occupied with representing human nature. But to what extent could this preoccupation he reconciled with the double intention guiding the artist's pen, to display a scene of fantasy and to symbolise ideas ? Characters who must at one and the same time take part in marvellous deeds of fable, and incarnate abstract ideas, surely cannot possibly

preserve to any extent worth mentioning the liberty of feeling and thinking like natural beings. Between these two obligations, of which the second is no less mechanical than the first, the margin left for the manifestation of life and human truth is likely to be very much reduced.

It is not reduced to nothing. There are in the *Tetralogy* a few expressions of real humanity, some natural touches drawn from life. Fricka really does resemble a jealous wife, domineering and of narrow outlook, and her domestic scenes with Wotan are sometimes good comedy—not divine, but middle-class. There is a spirit of pleasantry in the dialogues of Mime and Siegfried, which though very Germanic does does not lack wit or relief; they have the moralist's touch. Siegried is agreeable, if one puts aside the anarchic signification of his personality; but the author too has been careful not to let that be explained to him. This young Hercules charms not only by the splendour of his physical youth, but also by a certain child-like quality of heart. Brünnhilde is tiresome, with her final prophesy, to which nothing led up in her career as wild amazon, artless lover or even as betrayed wife, for she was only that in a roundabout way, and the experience cannot have taught her much about humanity. Apart from this point, why should this Sleeping Beauty be any more unwelcome in the Tetralogy than in a fairy story by Perrault? Take them all round, all these figures are pretty elementary. To us these persons give the effect of elements quite as much as persons. There remains, it is true, Wotan, the complexity of whose thoughts and sentiments might make a real moral

personality and introduce into the drama a really human interest.

Poor Wotan! His title of monarch of the gods, his lance, the mystery of his single eye, confer on him a seeming majesty. But strip him of these external attributes, and what a fall is there! From beginning to end his role is nothing but one long lament. And what does he lament? Some misfortune that has befallen him? Not at all, but his faults, and especially the fundamental irresolution of his mind, which knows not how to will or to refuse. In a mere mortal this complaining would be wearisome. Is it less so in a god? One may certainly say that it is very incongruous on his lips. Treated in a humorous or satiric vein the character might be excellent. This upholder of order who proclaims himself weary and disgusted with order, and who yet defends it by his acts while undermining it by his words, this monarch who is constantly saying or insinuating to those whom he believes capable of strong action, "Overthrow me! But take care how you go about it, it's not easily done!" who secretly puts the means of doing so in their way, and who when the scheme fails shows himself merciless in repression from fear of his conservative wife—this is a type that might be very successful if done in the style of Aristophanes. It is certainly not from this point of view that Wagner has drawn him; he has made up his mind to attribute greatness to him, a greatness superior to that of gods and kings who believe in the principles of their trade as rulers and who practise it with conscience and conviction. But why should I pretend not to understand? Wotan is indeed great from the point of view of anarchist philosophy. For such a philosophy what is next greatest after the open and

declared enemy of Law? The guardian of the laws who applies them while groaning over them.

To grasp, as far as possible, Wagner's intention we must understand Law in the most general sense—political laws, social laws, laws of morality, intelligence and thought, rules, institutions, discipline of every kind; these are what Wotan personifies, these are what must perish with the power and reign of Wotan. All this general body of principles of order Wagner sums up somewhere in one word. He calls it "the Monumental." He desires and foretells the crumbling away of the Monumental, and contrasts its detestable fixity with what, in a jargon which has unfortunately passed from Germany to France, he calls "Life." Like all romantic and revolutionary natures, he is incapable of understanding that the "Order" which offers itself and acts as a destroyer of living forces is not Order, but Routine; that real Order is the support and mainstay of spontaneous energies, and that the latter if not guided and kept in their channel by fixed elements are doomed to sterility and wretched waste. This error shows the violence of impulses where reason is weak. But what am I saying? There is one sphere in which Wagner is as far as possible from committing this error. That sphere is music. There he is not at all inclined to despise the Monumental; on the contrary, he glorifies it, he declares himself a thorough conservative, and never has a professor of harmony, counterpoint or composition preached the respect and sanctity of rules with such decisive energy. The fact is that music corresponded to the strong side of his brain

If we wished to probe further into the dark places of the *Tetralogy*, we should have to scrutinise the allusions

which occur in it to the previous phase of Wotan's existence. But upon what a confused region we should have to enter! It appears that before Wotan became master of the world, the founder and guardian of the laws, he too had lived the free life of Love—unfortunately he wearied of it, and this fatigue is symbolised in a ridiculous fashion by the quarrels of the elderly divine household. He conceived an ambition for Power, a desire for Gold and for Knowledge. To satisfy the last he sought the help of Erda, who is primitive and eternal Wisdom (Ur-Weisheit). But by doing this he worked for his own ruin. Power, Gold and Knowledge are the joint agents of destruction, the inseparable powers of death. Here let us recognise in a peculiarly muddled and deliquescent form the absurdities of Rousseau's discourse against civilisation. And that we may ourselves limit discreetly our thirst for knowledge, I mean rather our desire to interpret and reconcile all these ideologies, let us reflect that the thread of ideas is not Wagner's only guide in the world of ideas. He is guided quite as much by considerations of the picturesque. If the arrangement of some of his episodes is prompted by reasons of symbolism, others are what they are only for reasons of scenic picturesqueness, but take on a symbolic meaning after completion. This point shows the child-like simplicity and lack of common-sense of those critics who enquire too seriously what were Wagner's thoughts. The fairy story of the *Ring* is wrapped in clouds, some arising from the author's intentions, others emanating from the story itself.

VI

The care with which I have sought to distinguish the

various elements of invention in this huge work will enable me to speak with brevity of *Tristan* and *Parsifal*, which were created after the same formula. These two dramas, also, offer us a blend of the abstract with fiction, the union of a system and a fable.

The action of *Tristan* is wrapped in a poetry whose charm is at once heady and lugubrious. The frame within which it is developed, the circumstances of each scene add to the tragedy of guilty passion a sort of magical effect in which may be recognised the old Celtic imagination that invented this story of love and death. The vessel at sea, the fond tender avowal made over the symbolic abyss of the waters at the very mouth of the harbour where the royal bridegroom, already betrayed, awaits his bride, the meeting by night in the park, where far away are heard the muffled sounds of hunting calls, the torch waved from the top of the tower as a danger signal, Tristan on his bed of pain spending his days looking out to sea for the white sail that will tell him of Yseult's return,—it would be idle to deny the poignancy and strength of the hold on our feelings exercised by all these images, animated as they are by powerful and pulsing music. It is wiser to point out their dangers, and ask whether the extreme attractions of this poetic atmosphere do not serve as a deceptive wrapping for contents that are by no means proportionately valuable.

Let us consider by themselves the themes of the action. There is one of these that is of low quality, one might almost call it brutal; by repercussion it lowers the quality of all the others. This is the philtre, the love potion poured out for Tristan and Yseult by Brangaine. True, it is not this potion which gives birth to their passion. The natural

movement of their hearts and their youth was already throwing them into each other's arms. But sooner than yield to it, sooner than commit a triple felony against a husband who is his king, and who has entrusted to his honour the protection of his beloved wife, Tristan, and with him Yseult drawn in to share his sacrifice, would prefer to die. A violent solution, and very short, so to speak.—An infinitely preferable one, I will not say from the moral point of view, but from the point of view of art, which would gain from it far greater richness, real pathos and variety, would be the struggle of will against desire. But it is not even this solution which is adopted. It is a worse one. Inspired by a criminal devotion, the nurse Brangaine substitutes for the poison prepared for the joint suicide the irresistible love philtre. These noble lovers, imagining they are drinking death from the cup, drink delirium. When they put down the empty cup they have lost their moral liberty, that is to say their moral grandeur itself. They step down from the ship drunk and staggering with passion. They are no longer masters of themselves. They become frenzied victims of hallucination. Their souls undergo a terrible simplification.

And the philtre not only delivers them over to this fury of a passion whose sinful character they are no longer capable of realising. It has another effect on them, not less inhuman but far more extraordinary; it gives them over without any intellectual protection to the extreme suggestions of Schopenhauer's philosophy, or at least the philosophy of Schopenhauer as interpreted by Wagner. The reading of this philosopher had marked an epoch in his life; no sooner had he made his acquaintance than he swore by no other

guide; from that time he never ceased to mingle his teaching with everything, to resolve all kinds of problems after his principles. But what is most singular, and what gives one of the most characteristic signs of the gulf that exists between German and French natures, is that Schopenhauer's ideas set their stamp upon the late ardent and painful love passion which he experienced in his forty-third year, and which inspired him to write *Tristan*. There worked in him, in his sentiments and sensations, a combination of Schopenhauerian metaphysics, and amorous delirium which seems to us far from natural, and yet it acquired an explosive force in this Germanic soul. Schopenhauer's morality counsels the annihilation of desire, promising us as the goal of this effort entrance into some undefined state of divine slumber, some kind of pantheistic paradise in which all the movements of life expire and individuality disappears. And it would seem at first sight that nothing could be more opposed to this passion for the void than the exaltation of love.

But neither Wagner nor his heroes feel it thus. For Tristan and his beloved, love's supreme cry is a summons to the void; the expiration of desire in death is the very object of desire carried to its paroxysm. And this is not as one might suppose a sudden flash of imagination quickly dying out, that crosses their brains under the stroke of sensual madness. It is a steadily maintained idea. It is their one idea. It is the theme of their outpourings. They turn it over and over in all its aspects, which are terribly lacking in variety. They shout to "Day," that is to say Life, to be gone, and to "Night," which is the Kingdom of Death, to descend upon them and

wrap them round. They dream of the delights of perfect union by the annihilation of individual conscience. They analyse these delights with unrestrained and minute dialectic; they harp on them with a kind of incandescent monotony.

I would not be thought insensible to the charms of the love music in *Tristan*. I am, I imagine, as much touched by it as anyone. It has enchanting passages, in which the musician's inspiration is softened and humanised, in which the breath of night and the beatings of the heart seem to join in giving out a melody full of tenderness. But ought these celebrated passages to make us forget all those others quivering with a strident and sterile frenzy, that makes up for the eloquence of which it is incapable by the fury of repeated blows? Should they conceal from us the general spirit of the work? Oh, that spirit! let us not hesitate to reject it, to banish it far, very far, from us; for we are the children of humaner races who have ever found in natural healthiness and happy fulness of heart the true sources of beauty.

As regards *Parsifal*, its Christian aspect has caused the novelty of this drama as a feature in Wagner's work to be much exaggerated. Wagner composed a large part of it out of his oldest ideas. In it we meet again the Knights of the Grail, who had already inspired not only his *Lohengrin*, but also a certain apocalyptic vision of universal history, a cloudy legend of the Ages (the *Wibelungen*) outlined immediately after 1848, of which the Holy Grail forms the mystic centre. And what is Parsifal but Siegfried, a Siegfried chaste and ascetic, it is true, but still deriving from his candour as a "primitive," and from his childlike and utter ignorance of laws and men?

the virtue which makes him a redeemer ? The data of *Parsifal* when considered closely appear the most incoherent that Wagner ever collected, and it is only the theatrical beauty of the decorative images accompanying them that save this incoherence from being unbearable when the work is performed. We are not forgetting that the music of the religious scenes in *Parsifal* will remain among the finest creations of universal art. But that is no sort of reason for respecting what calls for derision, or if you prefer it a yawn. I mean the ideology, the spurious hermetism of this work. This hermetism is nothing but an impressionism, often puerile, putting on airs of deep thought. It is concentrated in the figure of the enigmatic Kundry, over whom the simplicity of some commentators has exhausted its efforts, without their perceiving that the ease with which a hundred meanings each more elusive than the last can be found in Kundry must have some explanation, and an unfortunate one, Kundry is the amorphous conglomeration under one proper name of a thousand confused scraps of sensations, abstractions and dreams. It must be noted that already in some parts of *Tristan*, Wagner had adopted a form of utterance that does not seek to have any particular sense, but aims only at the voluptuously vague impression engendered by a certain mellowness of sound in the words and syllables. Kundry is created by the same process. And it was this aspect of Wagner that exercised some attraction over our symbolist school of 1890.

VII

There is one idea that one finds again and again in all Wagner's works ; it occupies a dominant place

in them and forms, one might say, the leit-motif of his dramatic poetry. That idea is "redemption." In all his operas someone or something is redeemed, and the principal character is the redeemer, male or female. The fidelity of Senta redeems the Flying Dutchman from the curse which constrained him to wander eternally upon the seas unable to die. The pious death of Elizabeth redeems Tannhäuser from the servitude of debauchery. Siegfried redeems the old world from the reign of the Laws and from the tyranny of Gold. Lohengrin, Elsa, Parsifal are redeemers.

The persistence of this theme has struck several critics, who with infectious gravity have drawn the attention of their contemporaries to "the problem of redemption in the work of Richard Wagner." Thereupon they have embroidered all kinds of comments. But these comments seem to me quite wide of the mark, and I am not convinced of the need of this gravity. Why? Because I do not see the problem. There are in fact two alternatives. Either Wagner has only applied (as in *Tannhäuser* and up to a certain point in *Parsifal*) the Christian idea of the Redemption, and in that case the question is no more bound up with his work than with all other literary works written in the last nineteen hundred years in which this dogma is postulated: or on the other hand we have to deal, as in the *Nibelungen Ring*, with some romantic, socialistic, humanitarian, and necessarily confused transposition of the Christian idea; in that case there is no problem, only a tangle. Wagner as artist, as a being of exceptional sensibility, feels with peculiar keenness the social evils that belong to modern humanity. But the notion which he forms of them

is a hundred times more clouded and more puerile than what may be observed in the most unbridled French visionaries. It fittingly corresponds with the dream of a mystic revelation rising from the depths of nature to bring to these evils their remedy.

Visions like these have lost their power to attract. But there exists to-day a widespread tendency which is only too closely related to the most general tendency of Wagner's ideas, though it presents itself under more insidious, learned and subtle forms. I refer to a certain contempt for reason, thought, and experience, a certain pretension to eliminate from the formation of human opinions and beliefs, from the creation of works of the mind, the share taken by operations of reason and the guidance of criticism. All Wagner's written work breathes this feeling. What is it that gives all these redeemers of either sex their virtue? What is it that makes them agents of regeneration and salvation, revealers of truth? It is their ignorance, the fact that they are all instinct and sensibility, that they are "life" and pure spontaneity, with no element of knowledge. We have heard enough harping on this strain underlying more involved expressions. I am still waiting for those who take pleasure in it to show us or produce, in any art form they please, anything successful, consistent, and not still-born, that is not based on the calculations of strong and close reasoning.

This is the most irritating aspect of the Wagnerian ideology.

I have called Wagner's works dramas, but the term applies to their external appearance rather than to their nature and true quality. There is no drama where there is not living and active humanity, and I

think I have shown that there is little humanity in Wagner's dramatic inventions. Take away from them all the rubbish of symbolic significations, foggy abstractions obscuring ideas that are more childishly simple than is usually supposed, and what remains of these strange compositions ought to be called by its true name, poetic fantasies. They remind one of frescoes or rather of moving tapestries that unroll before our view natural and fantastic scenes of a heavy and expensive colouring, figures of strong and outstanding picturesqueness, but almost without life. This essentially German art form has its charm; it is free from vulgarity. There is no error of taste in taking pleasure in it, so long as it is only a petty pleasure, such as we might feel in some wonderful Nuremberg doll, which no Frenchman could possibly confuse with a statue by Houdon. I am considering these picturesque and poetic elements apart from the music which lends them lustre and wraps them in its brilliant charm. We shall now have to bring them again in contact with the music, as one brings together the terms of a problem after analysing them separately. It is for musical criticism to say to what extent and in what sense Wagner's music transfigures the themes of his poems. But if his music is of the same nature as his poetry, it may be presumed that in the marvels it has succeeded in rendering real, the enthusiasm of a very powerful German imagination for rich theatrical effects has generally speaking had more share than the pure inspirations of the heart and the subtleties of the mind.

CHAPTER VI

WAGNER THE MUSICIAN

On Wagner's music I offer not an actual study but merely some notes. This music is so well known to-day that it is unnecessary to analyse it methodically. But it still lends itself to a number of observations which need not lack novelty. I shall consider it not so much by itself as from the point of view of the services that its influence has been able to render, and the harm that it has been able to do, to the art of our country.

I

WAGNER'S MUSICAL DOCTRINE

When Wagner first appeared, his music was labelled "revolutionary." The epithet is vague. A man is always revolutionary in respect of someone or some thing, if only he has a personality and talent.

In taking the word as meaning "anti-classical" we shall assuredly not be departing from the more or less confused sense in which criticism used it. Does Wagner deserve that the word in this sense should be applied to him? Do the principles of Wagnerian art contain the negation of classical principles?

If this be admitted, then we may say that Wagner did exactly the opposite of what he taught, and of what he held to be good. Here is what I find in his essay on the *Application of Music to Drama* (he is

addressing his advice to young composers ambitious of imitating him:)

"I would above all warn these young people not to aim, in harmony and instrumentation, at effects, and only to place outstanding features of that kind just where there is some reason that fully justifies their employment. Effects without reason are useless. I have never met a young composer but was anxious to get my approval above all for his so-called 'audacities.' It was only thus that I came to see that the prudent conduct which I have so carefully set myself to adopt in my own works, as regards modulation and instrumentation, has been entirely overlooked. Thus in the instrumental introduction of the *Rheingold*, it was quite impossible for me to get away from the fundamental chord, because I found no motive for doing so. And as to the animated scene which follows between Alberich and the daughters of the Rhine, I could only introduce into it the tonalities that came nearest, because what passion there is at this point is expressed with an entirely primitive simplicity. On the other hand, I confess that in Mozart's place I should have given a stronger colouring to the first entry of Donna Anna when under the excitement of the strongest passion she dogs the steps of her criminal seducer."

He gives some other examples in the same vein, and one cannot fail to recognize the classical character of the doctrine that inspires him; to model the expression exactly on the idea without overloading or compromise; never to seek brilliant effects for their own sake; to regard as unhealthy all charm of form not taken purely from the richness and subtleties of the theme. I put in ordinary language what Wagner states partly in technical terms.

His object in the essay to which I refer is to define and contrast the characteristics of dramatic symphony and pure symphony respectively. What he says on this subject implies the principle of the separation of types in all its rigour—a work must conform with the type to which it belongs not merely in general aspect, but in all its elements and all its details It is not merely by the manner of developing the themes that symphonic style is differentiated from dramatic style, but also by the nature of the themes that suit it. Wagner's views on this point carry with them the affirmation of another rule no less general and classical.

" I cannot reasonably conceive a principal theme of symphonic development bristling with modulations, especially if beginning from its opening announcement it presents itself in this tangle of display."

In drama it may happen that a series of modulations each bolder than the last and following each other close is perfectly appropriate. There are emotions that call for these bold changes of expression, these vivid transformations of colour in musical speech. The procedure has in that case something so natural about it that though worked so hard it does not draw on itself the hearer's attention. The musician notices it when reading and wonders why he was not struck by it when listening. But the pedantry of narrow-minded professsors practises its censure on formulae of which it cannot see the reason through its spectacles. And yet if you look into it these professors are not so severe as Wagner himself would be in their place.

" It seems to me that in my dramatic music a great part of the public finds absolutely natural and frankly enjoys almost everything that evokes loud protests from our ' professors.' But if these professors were

to let me occupy the chair I would give them cause for much greater astonishment when they saw how far I pushed counsels of caution and restraint as regards the employment of effects of harmony. The first rule that I should give the pupils would be never to leave a key as long as they have something to say to which the key is suited. If this rule were followed we should see, as in old days, the birth of symphonies worth talking about, whereas our modern symphonies deserve nothing but silence."

To demand of symphonic themes a well-defined tonal character, to banish from them, or only admit with infinite discretion, modulation and chromatics, is fine healthy doctrine; it makes Wagner a frank "reactionary" compared with musicians who have boasted themselves of his school; or whom the public's superficial judgment reckons among his followers. It is worth while to dwell upon the thought he expresses. Symphony as everyone knows is a play of music upon given themes—it develops and varies them in a thousand ways, making them pass from one key to another, ornamenting them, combining them, and constantly reshaping their physiognomy by all the resources of harmony and counterpoint, breaking them up and embroidering on their fragments one new fancy after another, bringing them back to view in their original form and key, and after that making them run through a second and third cycle of transformations. In this game—at least when it is animated by the living force of real inspiration and is not engineered by a chill mechanism of scholastic combinations—the expression grows richer and richer, and is constantly illuminated with fresh aspects, with a whole world of new shades, subtleties and features.

But the value and pleasure of all this detail of the symphonic fabric are subject to one obvious condition: it is that the piece must present at the same time some general lines, a complete design, of which the hearer never ceases to be conscious and to which all the ornaments are subordinated. Without this condition of unity the most ingenious symphonic developments will not charm us in the least; they will give an effect of vain diffusion, of barren research. Now the lines which give shape to the whole are provided by the generated themes. These themes, therefore, must be simple and clear, of large and vigorous design, of clean-cut outline and of the most definite character, all things which presuppose a strong tonal and rhythmic determination. Let us imagine them with the opposite qualities: subtlety, complexity, ingenuity, fluidity, shifting tonality, vague rhythm. The result can be foreseen. We shall have shades of expression extracted from the development of an idea which itself expresses nothing but a shade, details engendered by the exploitation of an idea which itself has only a value of detail: these will have no charm save for those who love the amorphous, and even (a still more dreadful thing) the amorphous and prolonged. For all others they will be wearisome; they will be loaded with that special weariness which is given off by so many works of modern music chock-full (alas) of "science" and "craftsmanship." I call such weariness special in the sense that it is accompanied by a hope that is always disappointed: one keeps on hoping that so many sounds are going to produce at last a little music, and it never comes. The source of this weariness is to be found just where Wagner puts it, in the paradox that consists of wanting to construct sym-

phonies of classical form on a basis of invention that has nothing classical about it, of wanting to make something great out of the puny and trivial. It is to be found in the strange oversight of those musicians who notice everything in the symphonies of Mozart or Beethoven except one point—the nature of the fundamental ideas which are the very reason of the existence of their symphonic creations.

These views are of the most classical character, and it would be a good thing if the essay in which I find them expressed were translated into French. But it will be noticed that Wagner never learnt to apply them outside music ; he cannot get back to the general truths from which they proceed, and which concern all the arts. Wagner's culture was healthy only in the realm of music ; in everything else it was full of darkness and disorder, as will have been sufficiently proved by the analysis of his poems ; the reading of his works, wherever musical art is not very specially the subject, would prove it still better. And yet someone has managed to discover in his works " a thinker ! "

How were the two portions of his mind, so different and so unequal, able to collaborate in one and the same work ?

How could music inspired with the classical doctrine associate itself with poetry in which assuredly it will occur to no one to find this characteristic ? That is a question which can only be resolved by a somewhat detailed analysis of the relations between the music and the poetry of the Wagnerian operas.

II

CLASSIFICATION OF WAGNER'S WORKS

In the composition of the Wagnerian poems several distinct elements may be noted, and the special study which I have just devoted to them enables me, I think, to define these elements in a summary fashion.

I. Ideas. To be accurate, they are larvæ, phantoms of ideas: ideas social, political, cosmogonic, mystic, prophetic; a chaotic system picked up by Wagner in the intellectual grooves of the German nineteenth century and proving above all a complete inability to think, combined with an ardent ambition to do so.

II. A mythological realm of faëry, treated in the form of drama. The persons of the drama are in part the interpreters of the poet's ideologies, and as such they have no real existence. They might be called, after Victor Hugo, "shadow lips," and we might leave to none but the Wagnerian initiates (an intellectual race whom I have known very well, and in whom vivacity is not the quality that strikes me) the task of hearing what these shadowy lips say. But on the other hand, these persons of the drama have a soul. I do not assert that they have a character. Oh no, a character is something very complicated for fairy-tale heroes. But they have a soul, such as people have in fairy stories, a little soul that a little child can walk round, though it often animates an enormous body, the body of a giant, a dragon or a god.

III. Wagnerian drama contains another class of protagonists, which can only be so described by pure metaphor. They are, in reality, abstractions. But

these abstractions are not hollow. They embrace realities. They are the names of the most general moral forces, whose conflicts have since the beginning of time engendered human events,—Fate and Freedom, Greed and Love, Ambition and Disinterestedness, Knowledge and Instinct. These are the powers that guide the drama. Not that the poet has personified them in figures of flesh and blood. But his heroes constantly mention them, refer to them as the principles and motives of their actions. By this substitution of the abstract for the personal, Wagner's works wear the aspect of mediæval Mysteries. On the other hand the concept of these forces and their part in humanity and history is mixed with ideologies that are purely modern, revolutionary, romantic and Germanic. It is this that gives to the Tetralogy something that it shares with Hugo's *Legend of the Ages*, and the symbolical novels of Zola.

IV. The setting and scenery must not be counted among the accessories of Wagner's dramatic poems, but among their constituent elements. One might even say that they are both important elements. They are assuredly the richest and most ornate. This scenery is always a blend of the fantastic with landscape, of fairyland with nature.

V. Lastly, there is a fifth and less conspicuous element; among all these large and opulent features it is the only delicate thing. I am thinking of those passages of lyric reverie for which Nietzsche in the midst of his anti-Wagnerian diatribes expresses a liking. In these it is Wagner himself who speaks through the mouth of his characters, attributing to them thoughts and sensations whose subtlety does not always accord with their usual simplicity; but

touching poetry emanates from them. Thus Siegfried and Parsifal giving themselves up to recollection of their emotions in childhood—or Yseult enjoying with exquisite sensibility the beauty of the night, the murmur of the neighbouring stream, the sound of the distant horn. . . .

Apart from these five elements, we must pick out in Wagner's works two characteristics that largely contribute to give them their physiognomy.

First, their simplicity of construction. Their plot, disposition and arrangement are free from complication or overloading, and are easily surveyed. From every point one has a view of the whole. The author has shewn himself very clever in extracting from the rank growth of legend or old romances material for a clear and sharply-defined scenario. I am not speaking of that higher kind of simplicity that is proper to our classical theatre, where the action arises out of the natural movements of passion and of character, the hazard of events having only the smallest possible part in it, while " machines " have none at all, and where the theatrical effects themselves depend upon a moral cause. How could dramatic action in Wagner be thus developed, when his characters have, to say truth, no personality, or at most have only an elementary personality lacking fine shades, and bearing the same relation to the creations of Corneille and Racine that statuary of the dark ages bears to the figures of Donatello? The simplicity of Wagner's dramas is rather the simplicity of Perrault's tales, the simplicity of those happily conceived fairy stories, where little happens, but such events as there are are very strong in picturesqueness and colour, pleasant to the imagination, and connected with each other by a perfect logic—I mean of course fairyland logic.

It will be seen that my position is far removed from that of some critics who praise Wagner for having written "intimate" dramas. That is magnificent praise, but a grave illusion. It is true that these dramas are by no means overloaded with intrigue, and it is true that metaphysical clouds mingle with the development of their ingenuous plots. But a thing may be not overloaded with matter, and yet be materialistic, and what is cloudy is not necessarily "intimate," though many people do not distinguish as they should these two ideas. To my taste these dark portions of the theme make for superfœtation and cumbrousness. And when, at the theatre, I feel the pleasure which can, apart from the music, attach to Wagnerian spectacle, it is because I lose sight of them, I sweep them off my horizon, and am stupid enough to confine myself to what would have amused me when I was ten years old.

"Sir," said a Marseilles soap-boiler who was sitting next me at Bayreuth, "Why do the gods die at the end of the *Tetralogy?* I have never been able to understand that. You who appear to have studied these things will no doubt explain." "Sir," I replied, "my studies, which have borne chiefly on German philosophy and the exegeses of Wagner's disciples would I think enable me to give you a dozen explanations, if you were to address your kind question to me while holding a pistol at my head. As, however, you approach me in a milder manner, permit me to give no answer at all. That will be treating you as I treat myself, for I did not come here to yawn."

The soap boiler reminds me of an American who "had his leg pulled" by some young fellows, though they were Wagnerians of the strictest sect; it was

they who told me about it. They laughed over it as seminarists might after allowing themselves some innocent though rather daring pleasantry on sacred subjects. The American wanted to know what was the evil, the " wound " from which King Amfortas suffers, and which betrays itself all through *Parsifal* by such violent physical manifestations of pain. " An ulcerated stomach," they told him. The reply satisfied him, for he could now see why Amfortas is unable to take part in a certain much desired meal, which is no other than the Lord's Supper. The joke is assuredly very irreverent, for Amfortas' suffering is no empty name, it is not connected with silly ideologies, like the famous despair of Wotan, longing to die because in his soul " Knowledge has ousted Love " ; it is the suffering of sin, of moral taint, of remorse. Yet my Wagnerians ought to have realised that the mere possibility, were it only in the mind of this man from overseas, of believing their story, implied a sufficiently serious blemish in the work ; namely an excess of materialism and of material detail in the manner in which this suffering, which postulates a higher degree of spirituality, is presented to our gaze. This does not prevent Amfortas from singing some very fine things in the second act of *Parsifal* : their accent is in places sublime.

The second point to pick out in Wagner's dramas is the abundance of repetitions. This feature might seem to be inconsistent with the last—for if the plots of Wagner's dramas are simple and clear, we may well wonder why the poet finds it necessary for one or another of his characters to be recurring at every opportunity to the recital of past events. Let us refer to the terrible scene between Fricka and Wotan

in the second act of the *Valkyrie*, or to that in the third act between Wotan and Brünnhilde, where the ruler of the gods explains at interminable length to his wife, and then to his daughter, the origins and dark features of the situation. All that his speeches add to what we know already, to what has happened before our eyes, or to what we have been told, is a peculiar sort of obscure and barren commentary. Germans perhaps take pleasure in these passages of long drawn out sham profundity. Whatever power the heavy musical work expended on these passages may often possess, there is for Frenchmen nothing more oppressive.

Such then are the substance and basic arrangements that Wagner has set himself to express in music. It is obvious that the elements which we have found in them lent themselves very unequally to musical expression, and that some of them were quite incapable of moving or inspiring the imagination of a musician, whoever he might be. To have musical ideas it is first necessary to have genius ; after that an exaltation of soul is required which mental pictures and sentiments alone can produce. Wagner's theogonic and cosmogonic conceptions, his theorising day dreams on the origins, history and future of humanity, society and civilisation :—all these " ideas " which embrace everything and grasp nothing, their vacillating system which varied according as he found himself under the influence of the revolution of 1848, or under the influence of a royal friendship,—according as he had been reading Feuerbach, Schopenhauer, Gobineau or Gleizès (yes, Gleizès, a French vegetarian theorist who made Wagner a convinced vegetarian, as he has indicated symbolically in an episode of *Parsifal*)—all

this rubbish heap of doctrine, pseudo-philosophy, and hermetism, was too vague, too feeble, too lacking in solidity to rouse any feelings, or to present itself in images carrying the strength of inspiration. All this has nothing in common with Wagner's creative genius, it belongs to the weak, or rather unformed portion of his brain. When he has had to translate its verbal expression into music, what has he done? He has put in second-hand music. He has applied to these cold spots musical forms taken from parts of the work that have the warmth of inspiration, forms created by a burst of direct inspiration, which he has adapted by clever though up-hill musical work, better calculated to rejoice the eye of the expert who reads than to touch or charm those who hear it. The Wagnerian ideologies are the wasted part of Wagner's literary invention They have no part in the pulsing life of his music.

In view of the very peculiar substance of these dramas it is not surprising that the expression of human feelings does not hold the chief place in them. Among the panels of the Wagnerian monument it occupies neither the largest nor the richest in beauties. And yet magnificent specimens are not lacking.

There is no need to dwell at length on Wagner's love duets. Their charms and characteristics are well known.

If the impulse of a passionate and simple tenderness, the gift of two hearts, young and pure, still strangers to mistrust and vanity, opening to each other like expanding rosebuds, if divine and child-like playfulness of heart blending with chaste nobility of feeling,—if these are the things that can lend the finest and most inspiring charm to the expression of love, then Wagner has written no love scene that surpasses that of *Lohen-*

grin, just as, speaking generally, he has written no fresher, more youthful or more sweetly radiant music than that of *Lohengrin*. What matters the presence of a few out of date musical forms when the thrill of genius animates them, and the ardour of the artist's happiest poetic period colours them ?

As to the duet in the second act of the *Valkyrs*, while not denying its opulence, its extraordinary musical bloom, I confess that I am not so strongly affected by it. Its prelude is delicious poetry, and all music lovers remember that music of wood and harps unfolding its masterly harmonies while the door of the hut where the lovers are secretly to exchange their vows opens to the breath of the April night. Siegmund's song " Spring has routed Winter" is not unworthy of this opening. Some one has reproached it for being Mendelssohnian. Is the implication that Mendelssohn was a minor musician ? What follows, though the movement is so spirited, seems to me richer in ravishing forms and sonorities than in accents that reach the heart. I am not speaking of the superb peroration of Siegmund as he wrenches the sword from the ash trunk, but of those long confidences about the past that take place between the young couple, in which there is a procession (and there are to be so many in the course of the work) of all the mythologies and all the *leit-motiv* of the *Tetralogy*. I prefer the pathetically caressing inflexions of the song with which the same Siegmund, in the second act, lulls the sleep of his unhappy mistress who has been entrapped with him in the depths of the woods.

The duet in the second act of *Tristan* has proportions that may be called formidable ! I pass hastily over the first part, in which I have never been able to take

an interest ; indeed, as a listener at any rate, I could never clearly make it out. But beginning from a certain point on which all music lovers will be able to put their finger, what a flow of melody, what abundance, what rhythm, what outpouring ! No matter that Tristan and Yseult are young, it is no longer love as we saw it in *Lohengrin*, it is no longer young love. It is autumnal love, an aftermath of passion,— love that has passed forty, such as Wagner was experiencing in his own life when he wrote these pages : love that feels the shortness of the time before it as keenly as it enjoys its exaltation, because it has come late, and because it is a guilty love : it holds itself closer than it holds the beloved one, in a sort of attitude of defence against all that threatens it, above all against death, already lurking in the background. It is this flight from death's power that is required to give its character of complete abandonment to the final scene of passion at once carnal and ethereal, in which the two lovers give themselves up utterly to the dream of floating on the upper air to realise the passionate union of the senses. How different all that is from the sentiment of the Latin races ! If we aspire to the celestial region, it is not in the hope of becoming disembodied souls.

The reader will not expect here an index of the beauties of Wagner's music ; I will give merely a rapid glance at their chief divisions. It was not in the expression of love alone that Wagner was the eloquent interpreter of human pathos. It is true that the domineering jealousy of Fricka, the conjugal lassitude of Wotan, brought no characteristic inspiration to the musician. These gross gods have gross feelings, and the rather heavy style of the *leit-motiv* suits in this sense the movements of their souls. But Wotan's

paternal love, indignant, wounded, and raised by that very fact to a higher degree of affection, finds expression in cries and tones that are grand and moving. While considering this note of humanity let us not overlook in Wagner the gift of sombre and striking poetry for rendering moments of tragic suspense : see the end of the love scene in *Lohengrin*, the scene between Brünnhilde and Siegmund in the second act of the *Valkyrs*, and in the *Crépuscule* the scene of Gutruna distraught at the prolonged absence of Siegfried and the mysterious signs of misfortune. The use of affecting harmonies, of very low notes brought into prominence, of silent pauses, at these points is incomparable.

But all these tragic and poetic elements are not what most strike the eye when taking a general view of Wagner's works. They occupy a place to one side, as it were, because the human element itself occupies a side place, one might almost say an episodic position. Symbolism, mythology, fantasy, and landscape form the principal mass ; they are what the building presents to view when seen from a distance By the symbolic I mean those entities representing abstract powers who are the real protagonists of the *Tetralogy*, —Gold, Power, Knowledge, Love. Mythology personifies them, converts them into great figures ,and the genius of the poet too shows itself creative and inventive to the same purpose. These figures ally themselves by a thousand affinities with the varied spectacles of nature, they mingle with the thousand pictures of field and forest, mountain and river, and it is the impression of this blending that excites to the highest pitch Wagner's creative imagination ; from this come the musical forms that bear the strongest stamp of his individuality, and one may say the greater part of his *leit-motiv*.

What most markedly distinguishes these forms is their extraordinary plastic quality. The idea of musical plasticity, of trends of melody and harmony which by their picturesqueness and poetry offer a strongly significant relief and seem to stand out like sculpture in space, may seem paradoxical. The fact is that Wagner, alone indeed among German musicians of all ages, and alone of all European musicians in the nineteenth century, has realised that idea. But on the other hand there is an age and a country in which this type of music had flourished and had become familiar—the eighteenth century in France. In my study of Rameau I have already compared in this respect Rameau and Wagner, and I will not go back to it. But I would add that Rameau was only the highest and most glorious representative of a style that was once traditional and classical with us: I will not call it descriptive (the concept would be too small and narrow), but objective music, music used rather as the sonorous voice of beings and things than as the voice of the individual soul, rather as the carillon of the universe than as the essential expression of inward lyricism.

This second conception is German. According to the German aesthetes music has as its dominant and almost specific property the expression of the inward dreamland of the soul and the states through which the soul passes when closed to the world and wandering in its own bypaths. Many Frenchmen indeed have adopted with docility this Germanic idea, as they have a hundred other Germanic ideas, but the strength and health of French music have gained nothing thereby. In contrast with that conception we set the Wagnerian music as being of a different nature and

flowing from a different source. Do we mean then that the music of this German is not German? We do at any rate mean that in certain of its characteristics, and those precisely the most distinctive ones, it is in fact not German. Compare it with Schumann's music. It seems to me that if anything is Germanic it is Schumann's lyricism. Now nothing in the world is further removed from the inspiration of Schumann, than the inspiration of Wagner. For Schumann, Nature is poetic as the agent that excites vague states of feeling, vague hopes, vague delirium, vague melancholy and other moods, intense of course, of a sensibility that is occupied with itself alone and feeds only on itself. For Wagner Nature is poetic in herself, as a divine machine whose working and phenomena give the mind and the imagination their greatest delights. I certainly will not go so far as to make him a Frenchman on account of this feature; that would be to overlook huge differences of taste and style. With Frenchmen the musical rendering of things is subtle, sober, dainty, vibrant, lively, stripped and free from excess of matter, full of rhythm. With Wagner it is startling, opulent, sumptuous, streaming with colour; it makes far less call on rhythmic invention (which is not Wagner's strong point) than on forms, on harmony and instrumentation. But its spirit is not German. Wagner, who was so German, so pitiably German in his ideas and literary lubrucations is very little of a German at root in his musical genius, nor am I the first person to have noticed the fact. Some critics have even thought it their duty to point out in this connection that his father after the flesh, who must not be confused with his legal father, and whose name was Geyer (an actor and painter of talent)

was of Jewish race. I mention the point, and confine myself to saying that if a certain " oriental splendour " which as M. J. Marnold justly observes, distinguishes Wagner's music may be plausibly traced to Semitic blood, we have also to reckon with his incontestable and entire sincerity of expression, which comes from another source.*

What on the other hand belongs to German origin and formation in Wagner's music is the workmanship, the massive technique, the florid polyphony, the powerful and heavy tramp of the harmony, that has no caprices or jumps.

III

ORCHESTRATION AND THE " LEIT-MOTIV"

Wagner introduced into the musical theatre two novelties of far-reaching importance; they have made in the figurative no less than in the literal sense of the words a great noise in the world. These novelties are the enrichment of the orchestration and the *leit-motiv*. Some reflections on these two matters will be useful. They may have the advantage of emphasising the rule of extreme precaution which is necessarily imposed on young French musicians when they feel tempted to imitate the Wagnerian procedure.

The question of orchestration has a technical side, and it may be laid down generally that it is a very delicate matter exactly to appreciate novelties brought into the technique of the art by a musician, a school, or a period.

* I have elsewhere called Geyer Wagner's stepfather. His mother had in fact taken him as her second husband when the future musician was still a child. Geyer's actual paternity may be deduced from a thinly veiled indication given by Wagner himself.

Such novelties are of two kinds. Some constitute progress. Others are changes. The former correspond to a perfecting of music's means of expression, the latter to modifications of taste and sensibility.

The former class have the character of discoveries; they are produced in the course of the period elapsing between the beginnings of modern music and the moment when the language and laws of this music find themselves completely established. From that moment there is no further occasion for them. The latter class are merely a new fashion of employing elements already in use, and crop up whenever new shades of feeling call for new shades of expression.

This distinction is easily made theoretically, but its application might give rise to a great many controversies. What is the moment at which the technique of modern music is to be considered to have reached such a degree of perfection that nothing important could be, and in fact nothing was, added to it? And on what ground are we to decide whether such and such modern musician, who has charmed some and irritated others, but has left no one indifferent by the unprecedented sonorities of his music, how, I ask, are we to decide whether he has merely used the traditional language plus refinements and peculiarities of his own, or whether on the other hand he has not revolutionised the very basis of the language?

It would need a whole treatise to explain oneself thoroughly on these problems. I will confine myself to indicating the principles to which I adhere on this subject with all the stronger certainty because they depend closely on general truths of which I have no doubt whatever. A comparison will help me to define my thought.

No educated man worthy of the name will deny that there exists a classical French language which became fixed in the period of Malherbe, Pascal, Descartes, and the foundation of the Academy, and which has remained essentially unchanged ever since. The most recent in date of our good writers wrote it, or are still writing it, It shines in all the brilliance of its purity in Renan, Anatole France, Lemaître. The common doctrine of the great writers is that *everything* can be expressed in this admirable language, that there is no subtlety so fine that it cannot be rendered by it in luminous characters, when it is well handled : and that what one cannot, even by twisting it, make it say is not worth saying. The intellects for whom that language does not suffice, should blame some impotence, some deformity of their own thought. Whenever, in the last three centuries it has served as instrument to a new genius (I am speaking of real, not sham genius, a human and universally intelligible genius, not the presiding genius of a literary sect) it has recovered, has this old language of Bossuet and Voltaire, aspects of wonderful youth. What style gives contemporaries a more attractive impression of novelty than Renan's ?—and he is thoroughly classical at any rate in his finest passages. Whereas the " writing audacities " of naturalism and impressionism, which in the eyes of competent critics were old at birth, are to-day as everyone admits utterly decayed.

An analogous state of things exists in music. There is a classical musical language. Its fixation has been more progressive and has taken a longer time to attain its realisation, but none the less it was completed a long time ago. It is the language that Rameau, Couperin,

Haydn and Mozart wrote. It suffices for all healthy and normal needs of expression. If ever the day comes when it begins to fall into neglect, then European music will be starting down the road of decadence, and will fall more or less rapidly to the level of Arab or Chinese music, the level of Cairo Street. It is in the musicians who are called classical that this language presents itself in the character of the most perfect generality ; they remain therefore its immortal initiators, it is they who may be imitated without peril to a composer's personality. But at bottom Wagner's musical vocabulary, though far more individual and not admitting of direct imitation, is the same as theirs. I leave out of consideration for the moment the orchestration, which is, of all elements of expression, the most external. I shall speak of it later. I am now concentrating on the musical writing in itself—melody, harmony, composition.

There is nothing more permanent than this classical writing, but there is also nothing that lends itself to greater variety. It constitutes a very rich fabric, and in this fabric it only needs that the relative importance of certain elements be modified for its general coloration to give effects hitherto unknown. The chord of the ninth led up to in conformity with the most fixed laws of harmony only figures in the style of the classical composers in a transitory and fugitive state ; it merely occurs in passing. In Wagner this rich chord is promoted to a more brilliant destiny; it takes up room, it flaunts itself, communicating to the whole of the style in which it plays this part its fine flamboyant character. At the present day we have had more than enough of the ninth, we will have nothing more to do with it ; too many musicians have

overwhelmed us with it, not stopping to think that it was specifically suited to Wagner's class of creation, and to no one else's. An analogous remark may be made on the very subtle and delicate harmonies of such men as Ernest Chausson and Gabriel Faure. They depict the soul of a sensitive and highly strung French period, the period from 1880 to 1900, the period that saw itself in Verlaine. They will always charm, and these masters are assured of immortality by the purity of their manner of writing. But France's coming generations will not meet their like again except in a more vigorous and simpler art, a more open style.

The question of orchestration has its part in all these general observations, but with one reservation. Of all the elements of technique this one is affected by a condition peculiar to itself. Its progress does not depend only on discoveries of the mind and the ear as to properties of sounds in general. It depends also on the inventions of the instrument maker, on the instruments available at a given period. It would have been impossible for Lulli to introduce colour into his orchestra by means of horns, since the harmonic horn did not exist in his day ; Rameau was the first (in France) to employ it. We will admit for the sake of definiteness that the material basis of modern instrumentation appears complete in the symphonic orchestra of Beethoven, and that such as we find it there it suffices for all natural and human modes of expression by sound-character. What has been added since is of very limited application, and is only capable of giving certain special and episodic picturesque effects. We may say then that the four great musicians who have, since the days of Beethoven,

progressively brought new features into orchestration—Meyerbeer, Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner—have arrived at this result far less by the introduction of new instruments than by a new manner of employing instruments already available. That is far more interesting. But we must emphasise the fact that this new use depended above all on the increase of the number of instruments, the enlargement of the orchestral mass. The realisation of the sound-colours that suited the imaginations of these artists depended essentially on this point; they had to have at their disposal a great increase of sound-material.

No one has so much enriched instrumental material as Wagner. Those who marvel (without being altogether right or altogether wrong) at the splendour of his orchestra should pay attention to this very important detail. These splendours have a cause that is partly mechanical. Wagner provided for his contemporaries the enchantment, no negligible one, of a mass of sound colours such as the human ear had not till then enjoyed. But the operation by which he arrived at this result has in itself nothing of magic or genius about it. It is an arithmetical operation. What was required more than anything else was to assemble the instruments of each group in sufficient number to draw from them effects to which in less numbers they did not lend themselves. As all musicians know (but it must be said for the benefit of the profane), this was not by way of making them sound louder, which would be a result of no interest in itself, but of making them produce, by their harmonic agglomeration, new sonorities. In the old orchestration the wood and the brass came in to add touches of colour on the practically permanent basis of the

quartet. In the Wagnerian orchestration they provide of themselves completely fixed and startling colours, self-sufficient and capable of filling the whole picture. Certainly taste is required for the right employment of these colours when once one has them on the palette. But creating them was only a question of mass. Let us not confuse the effects of the big gun with the conceptions of strategy. And one may speak here of the big gun without the comparison being too forced. For besides the multiplication of the brass instruments already in use, Wagner added to the orchestra brasses of unheard of size which were manufactured for him, the tuba, the saxotromba, the double-bass trombone, which are really instrumental big guns.

Yes, it is a question of mass as well as a question of taste, a question of arithmetic as well as a question of poetry. These torrents and overflows of brilliance, this sparkling and incandescence, these azures and hyper-azures of orchestral colour, this phenomenal bigness, both "quantitative" and "qualitative" of the orchestra, were called for by the workings of Wagner's imagination just as the body calls for a garment that will fit it. There was fitness in the association of this form with this basis. The one required the other. It is unreasonable therefore to criticise, in itself and taken separately, Wagner's style of orchestration, as though Wagner, conceiving what he did conceive and feeling as he felt, could have been free to adopt any other manner of orchestration. His orchestration is what it had to be.

But surely everyone can see that such a remark, so far from enslaving our taste to the seductions of the Wagnerian orchestration, absolutely sets it free and

restores to it in this respect its full liberty. It provides us with the surest rule for appreciating at their true worth the influence exercised by this part of Wagner's art over the musicians who succeeded him, and the imitation and frequent attempts to go one better to which it has been subject on their part. It is not denied that for the detail of orchestral technique, and of the employment of instruments, an artist of the present day has a great deal to learn from Wagner, but that is not the point. There are methods discovered by Wagner as a great master of orchestral technique which may perfectly well be incorporated in an orchestral whole whose features will yet be not in the least Wagnerian. We are considering here these general features, we are considering, not the recipes of orchestration, but taste in orchestration; in particular we are enquiring whether there ought to be a tendency to augment Wagner's orchestral mass, or only to preserve it, or on the other hand to aim at restraining and lightening it. The reply is not in doubt. The Wagnerian type of orchestration is closely bound up with the nature of Wagner's ideas, and it is a profound mistake to orchestrate in the same spirit or to wish to go one better than him in the same direction, when one has not—when it is impossible one should have—ideas to express that have any kinship with his. That is impossible not only to Frenchmen, but to sincere artists of any nation. Wagner's dramatic and poetic ideas taken as a whole make a blend of extremely singular, and even entirely individual quality, full of artificiality and far removed from nature.

Wagner's extraordinary power of imagination (and never before was such imaginative power set working,

stirred and fired, by objects less natural), and the magnificence of some of his music, have gained for his literary inventions a certain fictitious reputation. But let us look at them by themselves. How foreign they are to all that is distinctive in ourselves, to all that our own culture has handed down to us, to all that appeals to us in whatever way! And in their exaggerated bigness, what a defect of real richness, what poverty of substance there often is! Is it not madness and servitude to insist on clothing creations of French literature and poetry in the same thick and heavy musical drapery? Our musical poetry, our musical drama, require a lighter garment that allows the luminous body of thought to shine through. Consider the class of subjects that Wagner has to translate into music: the slow and elementary thought of his monumental and childish gods, the violent but short-lived humanity of his heroes with their lack of real characterisation; consider above all the subjects and the spectacles of his mythological and cosmic fairy-land, the gallop of the Valkyrs across the clouds, the games of the Germanic water sprites in the depths of the river, the splendours of the divine palace built in the sky, the dragon guardian of the gold, the barrier of fire leaping from the ground at a sign from Wotan, Valhalla falling in ruins through space, the magic lance, the enchanted sword, the giants, the dwarfs, the Norns! All these things really required the twenty to twenty-five brass instruments, and the whole heavy artillery of his orchestra. But for our part we are concerned only with the general expression of human subjects; we have also an old tradition of the picturesque in music; but our picturesque is quick-witted, refined, salted with intelligence, thoroughly rhythmical, and

what should we want with these tyrannous paraphernalia? An orchestra that bears resemblance to speech, not to a tempest, is what suits us. "Oh," cried Nietzsche, "that orchestration of Wagner, I call it the sirocco!"

If, nevertheless, too many of our musicians have allowed themselves to be drawn by Wagner's example into this clumsy debauch of an orchestration that is overloaded, intrusive, ruthless, "obese" as someone has called it, which draws all attention on itself, crushing the dramatic and moral element, crushing the intellectual charm, crushing all grace, then what follows is inevitable. As far as general culture, reason and taste are concerned these artists have fallen far below the level that becomes French artists; French nature, which is either cultivated or ceases to exist, has become atrophied in them, and there is left nothing natural about them.

The stories that they will be able to put into music will be stories that have nothing human in them. The men and women whom they will put on the stage will have nothing of humanity but its outward shape; they will be phantoms, phantoms that speak and move it is true, but without any motive for doing so that could appeal to us. The kind of thing that Wagner sings, and sings with sincerity and eloquence, we cannot sing with sincerity because of our civilisation. I would deal in exactly the same way with the question of the *leit-motiv*. It is a big question, but is completely elucidated by what I have just said. Wagner's claim to have invented the *leit-motiv* has been disputed. That is an error. Musicians have always made more or less use of the repetition of formulae; but no one previously had done so (this

is absolutely certain) in a continuous and systematic way. The essential feature of the *leit-motiv* lies in these two characteristics; it is a fixed musical formula attached to a person, a sentiment, an idea or a situation, and reappearing every time they reappear on the stage or in the words. In the *Tetralogy* it often has a wonderful effect: often also it has a very heavy one. In any case the possibility of applying it presupposes a dramatic composition of a very special kind, one in which the characters have no natural life, and are personified abstractions or walking images rather than really animated beings. The fixity of the formula cannot be made to suit the expression of living beings or things in action or movement. It is therefore utterly absurd to employ the Wagnerian *leit-motiv* in the music of a drama of normal quality, I mean one that aims at giving us the impression of life and nature. A young musician not fanatically devoted to Wagner, once told me that whatever might be the case with other elements of his art he had at least found in the *leit motiv* the only possible means of giving musical unity to composition. I do not believe anything of the kind. The greatest dramatic musicians of the past left something still to be discovered in this respect; Wagner has the very great merit of having posed this problem of unity, but the solution which he adopted cannot pretend to have a general validity. The problem perhaps still awaits solution, at any rate in part. But sooner or later a genius will arise who will easily fill this gap, almost unconsciously, and certainly without having recourse to these gross and glaring methods.

IV

CONCLUSION

I do not think I have denied to Wagner any of his charms. I have owed to his art much enjoyment which I am very far from disdaining. But if I am asked what our art (apart from technical lessons, as I have said before) might advantageously borrow from him, according to my very humble opinion, I reply at once, "Nothing." Our life-giving streams are elsewhere.

Is that to say that his effect on French musicians has had no beneficial quality? Not at all! He administered a salutary shock. When he came on the scene French music was at a very low ebb. The period which extends from 1820 or 1825 to about 1865 was that of its lowest depression since it first began. Except for Berlioz, who had fine talent but was an ineffective musician,and some delightful comic operas by Auber, it was a period of utter emptiness, that is if one admits that replicas in plaster and sham glories based on successes of coarse quality are really equivalent to emptiness. It is possible, that our art would have recovered itself quite well, (and I believe it would have done so) without the help of Wagner. Still, the universal attention that he attracted by works of which the least one can say is that they gloriously raised again the fallen flag of true music, brought comfort and support to that generation of young French musicians, who were proposing to undertake the same restoration. They included Bizet, Lalo, Massenet, Saint-Saëns, César Franck. But these were hardly the men to wish to imitate him.

I have pointed out in what direction Wagner may lead our artists astray, and in what direction he has in fact led some astray. But speaking generally our music has remained independent of his. It has been since his arrival more French than in the immediately preceding period. People who, as some still do, set off Meyerbeer, Adolphe Adam, or Ambrose Thomas against Wagner as representing national music, are utterly wrong. The music of those composers had few French features. They were makers of Italian music, but they were weaker than the Italians; sometimes they were makers of German music, as it only can be made by those who are not Germans.

Moreover the wisest course is not to worry ourselves at all as to whether the music of our musicians conforms or does not conform to the national type. Let us ask only whether it is fine music, whether it is alive. If it possesses those qualities, we may make our minds easy, it is French. For one can create nothing living but with one's own nature. A Frenchman of France who has real talent has a French talent. For the last fifty years our country has shewn in the realm of music the most brilliant fecundity. Since Wagner's death its rank in music is the highest in the world. The half century which has seen the birth of the generation which is at present our pride, in succession to that whose most illustrious representatives I have named, cannot fail to have been French in music.

Let us however lay down a restrictive hypothesis. Let us suppose that considered under its most general aspect, the music—the good music—of this recent and contemporary period does not altogether satisfy us. Let us suppose that with its admirable qualities of nobility, style, sincerity, delicacy, expressive sublety,

learned ingenuity, sound work, it yet does not appear up to now to realise the idea or the dream that we cherish of the true song of our race. Let us suppose that on hearing a choir piece of Josquin des Près or Jeannequin, a comic opera of Grétry or Monsigny, a tragedy or ballet of Rameau, an instrumental piece by Daquin or Couperin, we find occasion to ask ourselves what has become of that health and vigour, that simple charm, that liveliness of mind and senses, that youth and enthusiasm, tenderness and simplicity of heart ; and to ask on the other hand why there should be this persistent odour of melancholy, this painful and somewhat numbing complexity of sentiment, this thrill of nervosity, these checks and hesitations of the lyric outpouring. Let us suppose, I say, that there are these gaps, these shadows on the picture. Are we to blame our musicians themselves for them ? Are we to put these things down to their peculiar formation or to the fact of some unlucky influence, of an artistic or professional kind, that it has been their lot to undergo ? Certainly not. We must seek a more general cause. And where shall we find it if not in the present and passing condition of French sensibility and French character, in the state of national life ?

Art is the child of its time. The time that is being brought to a close by the present terrible events was for our country a time of moral and civil depression, little suited to strong and abundant life of the soul, to energy of imagination. These events lead us, nay force us, to hope for better days. The French race has proved on the field of battle and in the trench that in the midst of the long and slow testing of the time before the war, and beneath its apparent lethargy,

it had at least not allowed its heart to degenerate. The experience of so much bloodshed and ruin will bring back (but at what price?) its heedless mind to the right path. The stoutness of heart that France has never lost, the mental balance that she has found again, the contentment that victory will bring, will restore her old-time joyfulness. And with her joy she will find again her Music.

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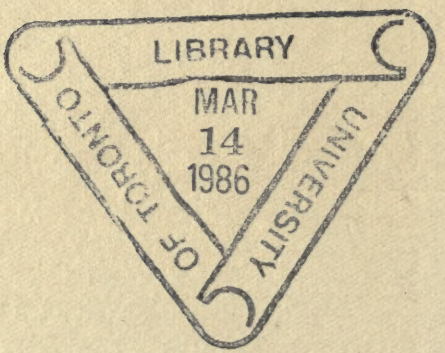
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